

The Mill of Silence



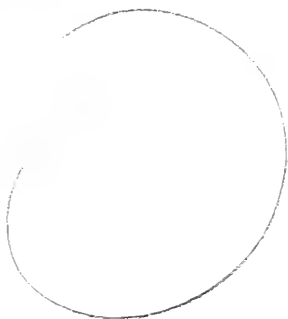
B. E. J. CAPES



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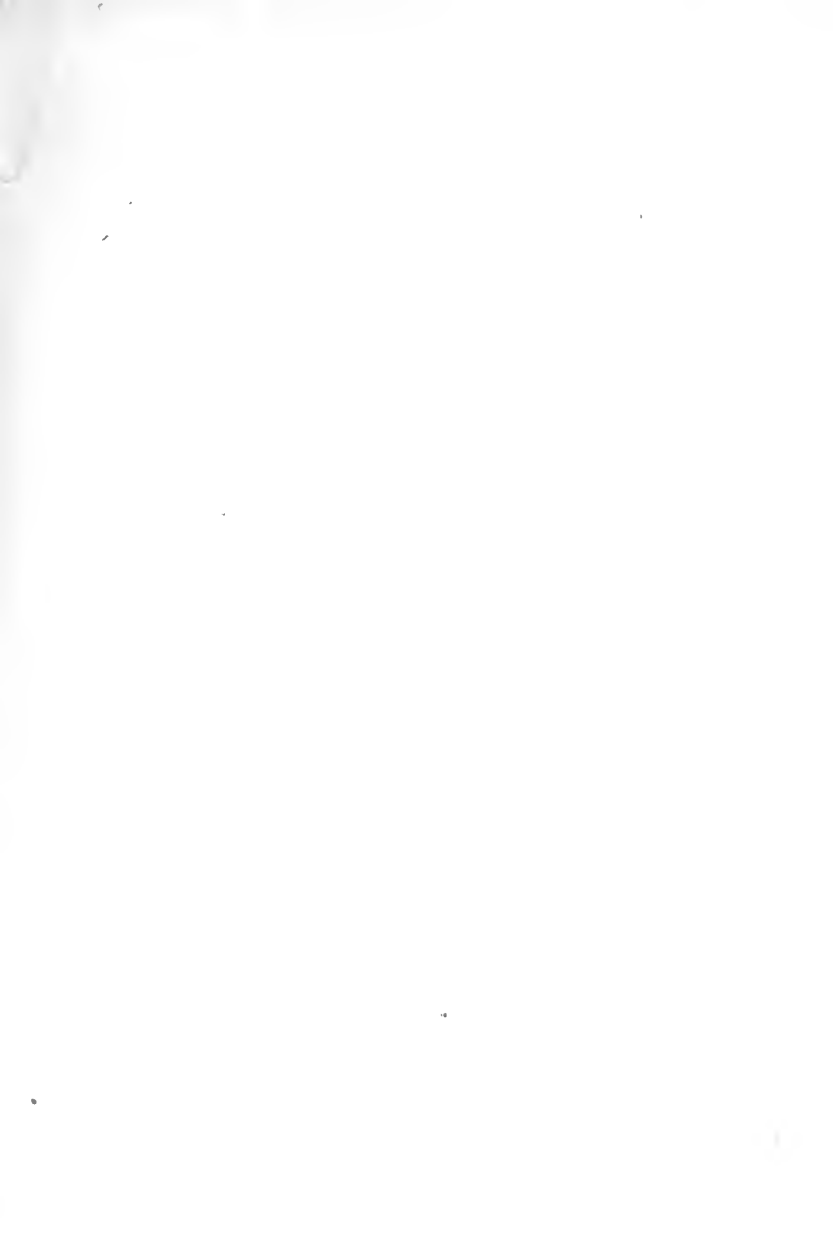
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THE MILL OF SILENCE.

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BY

B. E. J. CAPES.



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A PRIZE STORY

IN THE CHICAGO RECORD'S series of "Stories of Mystery."

THE MILL OF SILENCE

BY

B. E. J. CAPES,

Author of "The Uttermost Farthing," "The
Haunted Tower," etc.

(This story—out of 816 competing—was awarded the second prize in THE
CHICAGO RECORD'S "\$30,000 to Authors" competition.)

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THE MILL OF SILENCE.

Yesterday came a knock at the door—a faint, tentative knock as from childish knuckles—and I went to see who it was. A queer little figure stood outside in the twilight—a dainty compendium of skirt and cape and frothy white frills—and a small elfish face looked up into mine through shimmering of hair, like love in a mist.

“If you please,” she said, “Zyp’s dead and will you take care of poor Zyp’s child?”

Then at that moment the hard agony of my life broke its walls in a blessed convulsion of weeping, and I caught the little wanderer to my heart and carried her within doors.

“And so poor Zyp is dead?” said I.

“Yes,” answered the elfin; “and, please, will you give me back to her some day?”

“Before God’s throne,” I whispered, “I will deliver up my trust; and that in such wise that from His mercy some little of the light of love may, perhaps, shine upon me also.”

That night I put my signature to the last page of the narrative here unfolded.

CHAPTER I.

THE INMATES OF THE MILL.

My story begins like a fairy tale. Once upon a time there was a miller who had three sons. Here, however, the resemblance ceases. At this late date I, the last stricken inmate of the Mill of Silence, set it down for a

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warning and a menace; not entirely in despair, perhaps, but with a fitful flickering of hope that at the last moment my soul may be rent from me into a light it has never yet foreseen.

We were three brothers, sons of a gray, old man, whose father, and his father before him, had owned and run a flour mill in the ancient city of Winton in Hampshire. This mill stood a little back from the north side of the east and more deserted end of the High street, and faced a little bridge—wooden in those days, but stone now—through which raced the first of the mill fall that came thundering out from under the old timber building, as though it had burst at a push some ancient dam and were hurrying off to make up for lost ages of restraint. The house, a broad single red-tiled gable, as seen from the bridge, stood crushed in between other buildings, and in all my memory of it was a crazy affair in appearance and ever in two minds about slipping into the boisterous water below and so flushing all that quarter of the town with an overflow, as it were, of its own ancient dropsy. It was built right across the stream, with the mill wheel buried in its heart; and I can recall a certain childish speculation as to the results which would follow a possible relaxing of the house pressure on either side; in which case I hopefully assumed the wheel would slip out of its socket, and, carrying the frail bridge before it, roll cheerfully down stream on its own axle to the huge delight of all adventurous spirits.

Our reputation in Winton was not, I am sorry to say, good. There was a whispered legend of uncanniness about the mill itself, which might mean little or nothing, and a notoriety with regard to its inmates which did mean a good deal. The truth is, not to mince matters, that my father was a terrible drunkard, and that his three sons—not the eldest of whom retained more than a shadowy remembrance of a long-departed mother's influence—were from early years fostered in an atmosphere that reeked with that one form of moral depravity. A quite youthful recollection of mine is the sight of my

father, thin, bent, gray bearded, and with a fierce, not uncomely face, jerking himself to sudden stoppages at points in the High street to apostrophize with menacing fury the devils born of his disease.

To the world about us my father was nothing but a worthless inebriate, who had early abandoned himself to profligate courses, content to live upon the little fortune left him by his predecessors and to leave his children to run to seed as they listed in the stagnant atmosphere of vice. What the world did not know was the secret side of my father's character—the wild, fierce imagination of the man; the creative spirit of his healthier moods and the passionate reverence of beauty which was as habitual to him as the craze for strong waters.

He exercised a despotic influence over us, and we subscribed admiringly to his rule with the snarling submissiveness of young tiger cubs. I think the fragmentary divinity that nests in odd, neglected corners of each and every frame of life, took some recognition of a higher type from which it had inherited. Mentally, at his best, my father was as much above us as, by some cantrip of fate, he was superior to the sullen, plodding stock of which he was born.

Three days out of the week he was drunk; vision-haunted, almost unapproachable; and this had been so from time that was immemorial to us. The period of compulsory education had not yet agitated the community at large, and our intellects he permitted to run to grass with our bodies. On our pursuits, pastoral, urban, and always mischievous if occasion offered, he put no restraint whatever, yet encouraged a sort of half-savage clannishness among us that held the mill for fortress and the world for besiegers.

Perhaps it was not until I was rising 18 that any speculation as to the *raison d'être* of our manner of life began to stir in my brain. My eldest brother, Jason, was then a tall, handsome fellow of 19, with a crisp devil in his corn-colored hair and a silent one in his eyes, that were shot with changing blue. Modred, the youngest, some eighteen months my junior, was a contrast to

Jason in every way. He was a heavy, pasty boy, with an aggravating droop in his lids and a large unspeculative face. He was entirely self-contained, armored against satire and unmoved of the spirit of tears. A sounding smack on the cheek, delivered in the one-sided heat of argument, brought his face, like a stolid phantasm, projected toward the striker's in a wooden impassivity that was infinitely more maddening than abuse. It showed no more resentment than a battered Aunt Sally's, but rather assumed a mockery of curiosity as to the bullying methods of the strong against the weak. Speaking of him, I have no object but to present a portrait, unprejudiced alike of regard or disfavor. This, I entreat, may be borne in mind.

One afternoon, in late April weather, Jason and I were loitering and idling about some meadows within rifle shot of the old city outskirts. We lay upon our faces in the long grass beside a clear, shallow burn, intent upon sport less lawful than exciting. The country about Winton is laced with innumerable streams and freshets and therein without exception are trout in great quantity, though mostly shy to come at from the little depth and extreme transparency of the water. That the fishing is everywhere "preserved" goes without saying, and it follows in order that poaching is pretty general.

We were poaching, in truth, and extremely enjoying it as usual. Jason held in his hand a willow wand, fitted with a line, which was baited with a brandling fat from the manure heap. This it was essential to swing gently, ourselves crouching hidden as far as possible, into the liveliest streaks of the current where it ran cleanly over pebbles, and to let it swim naturally downstream the length of the rod's tether. Occasionally, if not so often as one could wish, the plump bait would lure some youngling, imperfect in guile, from security of the stones and a sudden jerking of the tough willow would communicate a galvanic thrill of excitement to our every fiber. The experience did not stale by a too-frequent repetition, and was scarcely marred in our eyes by the ever-present necessity of keeping a vigilant lookout for

baleful intruders on our privacy. Our worst foe, in this respect, was a great bosom of chalk and turf, known as St. Catharine's hill, which rose directly in front of us some short distance on the further side of the stream, and from which it was easy for any casual enemy to detect our every movement. However, as fortune would have it, the hill was but comparatively little favored of the townsfolk.

"Ware!" said I, suddenly.

Jason drew his line swiftly and horizontally from the water and dropped it and the rod deftly under the fringe of the bank.

We turned on our backs, lazily blinking at the sky.

A figure was sauntering along by the side of the little river toward us. It was that of an ill-dressed man of 45 or so, ball-jointed and cadaverous, with a wet, wandering blue eye and light brick-colored hair brushed back into rat-tails. His mouth was one pencil mark twitched up at the corners, and his ears, large and shapeless, stood up prominently like a bat's. He carried his hands behind his back and rolled his head from side to side as he walked. He espied us a long way off and stopped presently, looking down upon us.

"Sinews of whipcord," he said, in a voice thin as his lips, "and hearts of cats! What tomfoolery now?"

My brother raised his head, yawning lazily.

"Tom Fool hisself," said he.

"I am not," said the newcomer, "near such a fool as I look. I can tell the likeliest place for tickling trouts, now, anywhere."

Jason grunted.

"And that's the Itchen," went on the other with an enjoying chuckle.

We vouchsafed him a patronizing laughter.

"Too good," he said; "too good for lob worms and sand-hoppers. Where's the best place to find trouts, now—the little speckled trouts?"

"Where?" said I.

"Caught!" he cried, and pounced upon Jason.

There was a short, bitter struggle between them, and

the man, leaving the boy sitting panting on the grass, leaped apart with a speckled trophy held aloft in his hand.

"Give it back!" cried my brother, rising, white and furious, "or I'll brain you!" He seized up a great lump of chalk as he spoke and balanced it in his hand.

"Softly," said the other, very coolly slipping the trout into the wide pocket of his coat. Jason watched him with glittering eyes.

"Give it back to him, Dr. Crackenthorpe," I cried, "or he'll do you a hurt!"

In one moment the doctor dropped on his knees at the instant that the missile spun over him and splashed among the marigolds far in the meadow beyond; in the next Jason was down on his back again, with the tall man's knuckles at his throat and his bony knee planted on his chest.

"Puppy of Satan!" he hissed in grim fury. "D'ye dare to pursue me with murderous hate!"

Tooth and nail I fell upon the victor like a wild cat and tore at him. His strength was marvelous. Holding my brother down with his left hand, he swung his right behind his back, clutched me over, and rolled us both together in a struggling heap.

"Now," said he, jumping to his feet and daring us, "move a muscle to rise and I'll hold your mouths under water for the frogs to dive in."

It was the only sort of argument that appealed to us—the argument of resourceful strength that could strike and baffle at once.

When he had recovered his breath sufficiently to laugh, Jason tittered. From the first the fateful charm of my brother was the pleasant music of his voice and the pliant adaptability of his moods.

"Keep the fish, doctor," he said; "we give in." He always answered for both of us.

"Well," said Dr. Crackenthorpe, "that's wise." He stepped back as he spoke to signify that we might get on our feet, which we did.

"I keep the trout," he said, grandly, "in evidence, and

shall cast over in my mind the pros and cons of my duty to the authorities in the matter."

At this, despite our discomfiture, we laughed like young hyenas. The trout, we knew, was destined for the doctor's own table. He was a notorious skinflint, to whom sixpence saved from the cooking pot was a coin redoubled of its face value.

He made as if to continue his way, but paused again, and shot a question at Jason.

"Dad had any more finds?"

"No," said Jason, "and if he had you wouldn't get 'em."

Dr. Crackenthorpe looked at the boy a minute, shrugged his shoulders and moved off.

And here, at this point, his question calls for some explanation.

One day, some twelve months or so earlier than the incident just described, we of the mill being all collected together for dinner and my father just coming out of one of his drunken fits, a coin tinkled on the floor and rolled into the empty fireplace, where it lay shining yellow. My father, who had somehow jerked it out of his pocket from the trembling of his hand, walked unsteadily across the room and stood looking down upon it vacantly. There he remained for a minute or two, we watching him, and from time to time shot a stealthy glance round at one or other of us. Twice or thrice he made as if to pick it up, but his heart apparently failed him, for he desisted. Suddenly, however, he had it in his hand and stood fingering it, still watchful of us.

"Well," he said at last, "there it is for all the world to see," and placed it on the mantelpiece. Then he turned round to us expectant.

"That coin," he said, slowly, "was given me by a man who dug it up in his garden hereabouts when he was forking potatoes. It's ancient and a curiosity. There it remains for ornament."

Now whether this was only some caprice of the moment or that he dreaded that had he then and there pouched it some boyish spirit of curiosity might tempt

one or other of us to turn out his pockets in search of the treasure when he was in one of his liquorish trances, and so make further discoveries, we could never know. Anyhow, on the mantelpiece the coin lay for some weeks; a contemptible little disk to view, with an odd figure of an ill-formed mannikin stamped on one side of it, and no one of us offered to touch it, until one day Dr. Crackenthorpe paid us a visit.

This worthy had only recently come to Winton, tempted hither, I think, more by lure of antiquities than by any set determination to establish a practice in the town. Indeed, in the result, as I have heard, his fees for any given year would never have quarter filled a wineglass unless paid in pence. He had a small private income and two weaknesses—one a craze for coin collecting, the other a feverish palate, which brought him acquainted with my father, in this wise—that he encountered the old man one night when the latter was complacently swerving into the Itchen at a point known as "The Weirs," where the water is deep, and conducted him graciously home. The next day he called, and, it becoming apparent that fees were not his object, a rough, queer acquaintance was struck up between the two men, which brought the doctor occasionally to our mill at night for a pipe and a glass. He was the only outsider ever admitted to our slightest intimacy, with the single exception of a baneful old woman, known as Peg Rottengoose, who came in every day to do the cooking and housework and to steal what scraps she could.

Now, on one of these visits, the doctor's eye was casually caught by the glint of the coin on the mantelpiece. He clawed it at once, and as he examined it the man's long, gaunt face lighted from inward with enthusiasm.

"Where did you get this?" he cried, his hands shaking with excitement.

"A neighbor dug it up in his garden and gave it me. Let it be, can't you?" said my father, roughly.

"Pooh, man! Such things are not given without

reason. What was the reason? Stay—tell me the name of the man.”

I thought my father paled a little and shifted uneasily in his chair.

“I tell you,” he said, hoarsely, “he gave it me.”

“And I don’t believe it,” cried the other. “You found it yourself, and where this came from more may be.”

My father sprung to his feet.

“Get out of my house!” he shouted, “and take your ‘may be’s’ to the foul fiend!”

Dr. Crackenthorpe placed his pipe and the coin very gently on the table and walked stiffly to the door. He had almost reached it when my father’s voice, quite changed and soft, stopped him.

“Don’t take offense, man. Come and talk it over.”

Dr. Crackenthorpe retraced his steps, resumed his chair, and sat staring stonily at my father.

“It’s true,” said the latter, dropping his eyes, “every word. It’s true, sir, I tell you.”

The doctor never spoke, and my father stole an anxious glance up at him.

“Well,” he said, with an effort; “anyhow, it’s a small matter to separate cronies. I don’t know the value of these gimcracks, but as you take pleasure in collecting ’em, I’ll—I’ll—come now, I’ll make you a present of it.”

The doctor became human once more, and for a second time clutched the coin radiantly. My father heaved a profound sigh, but he never moved.

“Well,” he said, “now you’ve got it, perhaps you’ll state the particular value of that old piece of metal.”

“It’s a gold Doric!” cried the doctor; “as rare a——” he checked himself suddenly and went on with a ludicrous affectation of indifference—“rare enough just to make it interesting. No intrinsic value—none whatever.”

A little wicked smile twitched up my father’s bearded cheeks. Each man sat forward for some minutes pulling at his pipe; but it was evident the effort of social commonplace was too much for Dr. Crackenthorpe. Presently he rose and said he must be going. He was obviously on thorns until he could secure his treasure in a

safe place. For a quarter of an hour after the door had closed behind him, my father sat on gloomily smoking and muttering to himself. Then suddenly he woke to consciousness of our presence and ordered us, savagely, almost madly, off to bed.

This explains the doctor's question of Jason and is a necessary digression. Now to the meadows once more and a little experience that befell there after the intruder's departure.

CHAPTER II.

A NIXIE.

My brother tired of his fishing for the nonce, and for an hour we lay on our backs in the grass chatting desultorily.

"Jason," said I, suddenly, "what do we live on?"

"What we can get," said my brother, sleepily.

"But I mean—where does it come from; who provides it?"

"Oh, don't bother, Renny. We have enough to eat and drink and do as we like. What more do you want?"

"I don't know. I want to know, that's all. I can't tell why. Where does the money come from?"

"Tom Tiddler. He was our grandfather."

"Don't be a fool. Dad never worked the mill that we remember."

"But Tom Tiddler did before him."

"Not to the tune that would keep four loafers in idleness for sixteen years."

"Well, I don't care. Perhaps dad's a highwayman."

I kicked at the grass impatiently.

"It must end some day, you know."

Jason tilted his cap from his eyes and blinked at me.

"What d'ye mean, piggy?"

"Suppose dad died or went mad?"

"We'd sell the mill and have a rare time of it."

"Oh, you great clown! Sell it for what? Driftwood? And how long would the rare time last?"

"You're mighty particular to-day. I hate answering questions. Let me alone."

"I won't," I said, viciously. "I want your opinion."

"Well, it's that you're a precious fool!"

"What for?"

"To bother your head with what you can't answer, when the sun's shining."

"I can't help bothering my head," I said. "I've been bothering it, I think, ever since dad gave old Cracken-thorpe that medal last year."

Jason sat up.

"So you noticed it, too," he said. "Renny, there's depths in the old man that we sha'n't plumb."

"Well, I've taken to thinking of things a bit," said I.

Jason—so named, at any period (I never saw a register of the christening of any one of us) because of his golden fleece, shook it and set to whistling softly.

His name—Modred's, too—mine was Renalt, and more local—were evidence of my father's superior culture as compared with most of his class. They were odd, if you like, but having a little knowledge and fancifulness to back them, gave proof of a certain sum of desultory reading on his part; the spirit of which was transmitted to his children.

I was throwing myself back with a dissatisfied grunt, when of a sudden a shrill screech came toward us from a point apparently on the river path fifty yards lower down. We jumped to our feet and raced headlong in the direction of the sound. Nothing was to be seen. It was not until the cry was repeated, almost from under our very feet, that we realized the reason of it.

All about Winton the banks of the main streams are pierced at intervals to admit runlets of clear water into the meadows below. Such a boring there was of a goodish caliber at the point where we stopped; and here the water, breaking through in a little fall, tumbled into a stone basin, some three feet square and five deep, that was sunk to its rim in a rough trench of the meadow soil. Into this brimming trough a young girl had slipped and would drown in time, for, though she clung

on to the edge with frantic hands, her efforts to escape had evidently exhausted her to such an extent that she could now do no more than look up to us, as we stood on the bank above, with wild, beseeching eyes.

I was going to jump to her help, when Jason stayed me with his hand.

"Hist, Renny!" he whispered. "I've never seen a body drown."

"Nor shall," said I, hoping he jested.

"Let me shove her hands off," he said, in the same wondering tone. One moment, with a shock, I saw the horrible meaning in his face; the next, with a quick movement I had flung him down and jumped. He rose at once with a slight cut on his lips, but before he could recover himself I had the girl out by the hands and had stretched her limp and prostrate on the grass. Then I paused, embarrassed, and he stood above looking down upon us.

"You'll have to pay for that, Renny," he said, "sooner or later"—and, of course, I knew I should.

"Turn the creature on her face, you dolt!" he continued, "and let the water run out of her pipes."

I endeavored to comply, but the girl, always keeping her eyes shut, resisted feebly. I dropped upon my knees and smoothed away the sodden tresses from her face. Thus revealed it seemed an oddly pretty one; the skin half transparent, like rice paper; the forehead rounding from the nose like a kitten's. But she never opened her eyes, so that I could not see what was their color, though the lashes were black.

Presently a horror seized me that she was dead, and I shook her pretty roughly by the shoulder.

"Oh," she cried, with a whimper, "don't!"

I was so rejoiced at this evidence of life that I gave a whoop. Then I bent over her.

"It's all right, girl," I said; "you're safe; I saved you."

Her lips were moving again and I stopped to listen.

"What did he want to drown me for?" she whispered.

She was thinking of my brother, not of me. For a

flash her eyes opened, violet, like lightning, and glanced up at him standing above; then they closed again.

"Come," I said, roughly; "if you can talk, you can get up."

The girl struggled into a sitting posture and then rose to her feet. She was tall, almost as tall as I was, and about my age, I should think. Her dress, so far as one could judge, it being sopped with water, was a poor patched affair, and rough country shoes were on her feet."

"Take me somewhere, where I can dry," she said, imperiously. "Don't let him come—he needn't follow."

"He's my brother," I said.

"I don't care. He wanted to drown me; he didn't know I can't die by water."

"Can't you?" I said.

"Of course not. I'm a changeling!"

She said it with a childish seriousness that confounded me.

"What made you one?" I asked.

"The fairies," she said, "and that's why I'm here."

I was too bewildered to pursue the subject further.

"How did you fall in there?" I asked.

"I saw some little fish, like klinkents of rainbow, and wanted to catch them; then I slipped and soused."

"Well," I said, "where are you going now?"

"With you," she answered.

I offered no resistance. I gave no thought to results, or to what my father would say when this grotesque young figure should break into his presence. Mechanically I started for home and she walked by my side, chatting. Jason strode in our rear, whistling.

"What a brute he must be!" she said once, jerking her head backward.

"Leave him alone," I said, "or we shall quarrel. What's a girl like you to him?"

I think she hardly heard me, for the whistle had dropped to a very mellow note. To my surprise I noticed that she was crying.

"I thought changelings couldn't cry?" I said.

"I tell you water does not affect me," she answered, sharply. "What a mean spy you are—for a boy."

I was very angry at that and strode on with black looks, whereupon she edged up to me and said, softly: "Don't be sore with me, don't."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Let's kiss and be friends," she whispered.

For the first time in my life I blushed furiously.

"You beast," I said, "to think that men would kiss!"

She gave me a sounding smack on the shoulder and I turned on her furiously.

"Oh, yes!" she cried, "hit out at me, do! It's like you."

"I won't touch you!" I said. "But I won't have anything more to do with you," and I strode on, fuming. She followed after me and presently I heard her crying again. At this my anger evaporated and I turned round once more.

"Come on," I said, "if you want to, and keep a civil tongue in your head."

Presently we were walking together again.

"What's your home, Renny?" she asked, by and by.

"A mill," I answered, "but nothing is ground there now."

She stopped and so did I, and she looked at me curiously, with her red lips parted, so that her teeth twinkled.

"What's the matter?" said I.

"Nothing," she said, "only I remember an old, old saying that the woman told me."

"What woman?" I asked, in wonder, but she took no notice of my question, only repeated some queer doggerel that ran somewhat as follows:

"Where the mill race is
Come and go faces,
Once deeds of violence;
Now dust and silence.
Thither thy destiny
Answer what speaks to thee."

CHAPTER III.

THE MILL AND THE CHANGELING.

The outer appearance of the old mill in which we lived and grew up I have touched upon; and now I take up my pen to paint in black and white the old, moldering interior of the shell.

The building stood upon a triple arch of red brick that spanned the stream, and extended from shore to shore, where, on each side, a house of later date stood cheek to jowl with it. It looked but an indifferent affair as viewed from the little bridge aforesaid, which was dedicated to St. Swithun of watery memory, but in reality extended further backward than one might have suspected. Moreover, to the east side a longish wing, with a ridged roof of tiles, ran off at right angles and added considerably to the general dimensions. To the west stood a covered yard, where once the mill wagons were packed or unloaded; but this, in all my memory of it, yawned only a dusty spave, given over to the echoes and a couple of ancient cart wheels whose rusty tires and worm-pierced hubs were mute evidence of an inglorious decay.

These were for all to see—but behind the walls!

Was the old mill uncanny from the first, or is it only the ghosts with which our generation of passions has peopled it that have made it so? This I can say: That I never remember a time when Jason or I, or even Zyp, dared to be in the room of silence alone—and in company never for more than a few minutes. Modred had not the same awe of it, but Modred's imagination was a swaddled infant. For my father I will not speak. Maybe he was too accustomed to specters to dread them.

This room was one on the floor above the water, and the fact that it harbored the mill wheel, whose booming, when in motion, shook the stagnant air with discordant

sounds, may have served as some explanation of its eeriness. It stood against the east wing and away from the yard, and was a dismal, dull place, like a loft, with black beams above going off into darkness. Its only light came from a square little window in front that was bleared with dust and stopped outside with a lacework of wire. Against its western wall was reared a huge box or cage of wood, which was made to contain the upper half of the wheel, with its ratchet and shaft that went up to the great stones on the floor above; for the mill race thundered below, and when the great paddles were revolving the water slapped and rent at the woodwork.

Now it behooves me to mention a strange fancy of my father's—which was this, that though no grain or husk in our day ever crumbled between the stones, the wheel was forever kept in motion, as if our fortunes lay in grinding against impalpable time. The custom was in itself ghostly, and its regularity was interrupted only at odd moments, and those generally in the night, when, lying abed upstairs, we boys would become conscious of a temporary cessation of the humming, vibrating noise that was so habitual to the place. To this fancy was added a strange solicitude on the part of my father for the well-being of the wheel itself. He would disappear into the room of silence twice or thrice a day to oil and examine it, and if rarely any tinkering was called for we knew it by the sound of the closing of the sluice and of the water rush swerving round by another channel.

Now, for the time I have said enough, and with a sigh return to that May afternoon and little Zyp, the changeling.

She followed me into the mill so quietly that I hardly heard her step behind me. When I looked back her eyes were full of a strange speculation and her hands crossed on her breast, as if she prayed. She motioned me forward and I obeyed, marveling at my own submission. I had no slightest idea what I was to say to my father or what propose. We found him seated by the table in the living room upstairs, a bottle and glass before him. The

weekly demon was beginning to work, but had not yet obtained the mastery. He stared at us as we entered, but said nothing.

Then, to my wonder, Zyp walked straight up to the old man, pulled his arms down, sat upon his knee and kissed his rutted cheek. I gave a gasp that was echoed by Jason, who had followed and was leaning against the lintel of the open door. Still my father said nothing and I trembled at the ominous silence. At last in desperation I stammered, and all the time Zyp was caressing the passive face.

"Dad, the girl fell into the water and I pulled her out, and here she is."

Then at length my father said in a harsh, deep voice:

"You pulled her out? What was Jason there doing?"

"Waiting for her to drown," my brother answered for himself, defiantly forestalling conviction.

My father put the girl from him, strode furiously across the room, seized Jason by one arm and gave him several cruel, heavy blows across his shoulders and the back of his head. The boy was half stunned, but uttered no cry, and at every stroke Zyp laughed and clapped her hands. Then, flinging his victim to the floor, from which he immediately rose again and resumed his former posture by the door, pale but unsubdued, my father returned to his seat and held the girl at arm's length before him.

"Who are you?" he said.

She answered, "A changeling," in a voice soft as flowers.

"What's your name?"

"Zyp."

"Your other name?"

"Never mind; Zyp's enough."

"Is it? Where do you come from? What brings you here?"

"Renny brought me here because I love him."

"Love him? Have you ever met before?"

"No; but he pulled me out of the water."

"Come—this won't do. I must know more about you."

She laughed and put out her hand coaxingly.

"Shall I tell you? A little, perhaps. I am from a big forest out west there, where wheels drone like hornets among the trees and black men rise out of the ground. I have no father or mother, for I come of the fairies. Those who stood for them married late and had a baby and they delayed to christen it. One day the baby was gone and I was there. They knew me for a changeling from the first and didn't love me. But I lived with them for all that and they got to hate me more and more. Not a cow died or a gammer was wryed wi' the rheumatics but I had done it. Bit by bit the old man lost all his trade and loved me none the more, I can tell you. He was a Beast Leech, and where was the use of the forest folk sending for him to mend their sick kine when he kept a changeling to undo it all? At last they could stand no more of it and the woman brought me away and lost me."

"Lost you?" echoed my father.

"Oh," said Zyp, with a little cluck, "I knew all along how the tramp was to end. There was an old one, a woman, lived in the forest, and she told me a deal of things. She knew me better than them all, and I loved her because she was evil, so they said. She told me some rhymes and plenty of other things."

"Well?" said my father.

"We walked east by the sun for days and days. Then we came to the top of a big, soft hill, where little beetles were hopping among the grass, and below us was a great town like stones in a green old quarry, and the woman said: 'Run down and ask the name of it while I rest here.' And I ran with the wind in my face and was joyful, for I knew that she would escape when I was gone, and I should never see her again."

"And then you tumbled into the water?" said my father.

Zyp nodded.

"And now," she said, "I belong to nobody, and will you have me?"

My father shook his head, and in a moment sobs most

piteous were shaking the girl's throat. So forlorn and pretty a sight I have never seen before or since.

"Well," he said, "if nobody comes to claim you, you may stop."

And stop Zyp did. Surely was never an odder coming, yet from that day she was one of us.

What was truthful and what imaginative in her story I have never known, for from first to last this was the most we heard of it.

One thing was certain. Zyp was by nature a child of the open air and the sun. Flowers that were wild she loved—not those that were cultivated, however beautiful, of which she was indifferent—and she had an unspeakable imagination in reading their fanciful histories and a strange faculty for fondling them, as it were, into sentient beings. I can hardly claim belief when I say that I have seen a rough nettle fade when she scolded it for stinging her finger, or a little yellow rock rose turn from the sun to her when she talked to it.

Zyp never plucked a flower, or allowed us to do so if she could prevent it. I well remember the first walk I took with her after her establishment in the mill, when I was attracted by a rare little blossom, the water chickweed, which sprouted from a grassy trench, and pulled it for her behoof. She beat me savagely with her soft hands, then fell to kissing and weeping over the torn little weed, which actually appeared to revive a moment under her caresses. I had to promise with humility never to gather another wild flower so long as I lived, and I have been faithful to my trust.

The afternoon of her coming old Peg rigged her up some description of sleeping accommodation in a little room in the attic, and this became her sanctuary whenever she wished to escape us and be alone. To my father she was uniformly sweet and coaxing, and he for his part took a strange fancy to her, and abated somewhat of his demoniacal moodiness from the date of her arrival.

Yet it must not be imagined, from this description of her softer side, that Zyp was all tender pliability. On the contrary, in her general relations with us and others as

impure human beings, she was the veritable soul of impishness, and played a thousand pranks to prove her title to her parentage.

At first she made a feint of distributing her smiles willfully, by turn, between Modred and me, so that neither of us might claim precedence. But Jason was admitted to no pretense of rivalry; though, to do him justice, he at once took the upper hand by meeting scorn with indifference. In my heart, however, I claimed her as my especial property; a demand justified, I felt no doubt, by her manner toward me, which was marked by a peculiar rebellious tenderness she showed to no other.

The day after her arrival she asked me to take her over the mill and show her everything. I complied when the place was empty of all save us. We explored room by room, with a single exception, the ancient building.

Of course Zyp said: "There's a room you haven't shown me, Renny."

"Yes," said I; "the room of silence."

"Why didn't we go there?"

"Never mind. There's something wicked in it."

"What? Do tell me! Oh, I should love to see!"

"There's nothing to see. Let it alone, can't you?"

"You're a coward. I'll get the sleepy boy to show me."

"Come along then," I said, and, seizing her hand, dragged her roughly indoors.

We crossed a dark passage, and, pushing back a heavy door of ancient timber, stood on the threshold of the room of silence. It was not in nature's meaning that the name was bestowed, for, entering, the full voice of the wheel broke upon one with a grinding fury that shook the moldering boards of the floor.

"Well," I whispered, "have you seen enough?"

"I see nothing," she cried, with a shrill, defiant laugh; "I am going in"—and before I could stop her, she had run into the middle of the room and was standing still in the bar of sunlight, with her arms outspread like wings, and her face, the lips apart, lifted with an expression on it of eager inquiry.

What happened? I can find an image only in the poison bottle of the entomologist. As some shining, flower-stained butterfly, slipped into this glass coffin, quivers, droops its wings and fades, as it were, in a moment before its capturer's eyes, so Zyp faded before mine. Her arms dropped to her sides, her figure seemed as if its whole buoyancy were gone at a touch, her face fell to a waxen color and "Oh, take me away!" she wailed in a thin, strangled voice.

I conquered my terror, rushed to her, and, dragging her stumbling and tripping from the room, banged to the door behind us and made for the little platform once more and the open air.

She revived in a wonderfully short space of time, and, lifting up her head, looked into my eyes with her own wide with dismay.

"It was hideous," she whispered; "why didn't you stop me?"

Zyp, it will be seen, was not all elf. She had something in common with her sex.

"I warned you," I said, "and I know what you felt."

"It was as if a question was being asked of me," she said, in a low voice. "And yet no one spoke and there was no question. I don't know what it wanted or what were the words, for there were none; but I feel as if I shall have to go on thinking of the answer and struggling to find it forever and ever."

"Yes," I whispered, in the same tone; "that is what everybody says."

She begged me not to follow her, and crept away quite humbled and subdued, and we none of us saw more of her that day. But just as she left me she turned and whispered in awe-stricken tone, "Answer what speaks to thee," and I could not remember when and where I had heard these words before.

CHAPTER IV.

ZYP BEWITCHES.

In the evening Dr. Crackenthorpe paid us a visit. He found my father out, but elected to sit with us and smoke his pipe expectant of the other's return.

He always treated us boys as if we were so much dirt, and we respected his strength just sufficiently to try no pranks on him in the absence of the ruling power. But nevertheless we resented his presumption of authority, and whenever he sat with us alone made an exaggerated affectation of being thick in whispered confidences among ourselves.

Zyp was still upstairs and the doctor had not as yet seen her, but he was conscious, I think, in some telepathic way, of an alien presence in the house, for he kept shifting his position uneasily and looking toward the door. A screech from his lips suddenly startled us, and we turned round to see the long man standing bolt upright, with his face gone the color of a meal sack, and his bold eyes staring prominent.

"What's the matter?" said Jason.

Gradually the doctor's face assumed a dark look of rage.

"Which of you was it?" he cried in a broken voice; "tell me, or I'll crack all your fingers up like fire sticks!"

"What's the matter?" said Jason, again; "you see for yourself we've been sitting by the table all the time you've been there."

"Something spoke—somebody, I tell you, as I sat here in the chimney corner!" He was beside himself with fury and had great ado to crush his emotion under. But he succeeded, and sat down again trembling all over.

"A curse is on the house!" he muttered; then aloud:

"I've had enough of your games, you black vermin! I won't stand it, d'ye hear? Let there be an end!"

We stared, dropped into our seats and were beginning our confidences once more, when the doctor started up a second time with a loud oath, and leaped into the middle of the room.

"Great thunder!" he shouted; "d'ye dare!"

This time we had all heard it—a wailing whisper that seemed to come from the neighborhood of the chimney and to utter the words: "Beware the demon that sits in the bottle," and of the whole company only I was not confounded.

As to the doctor, he suddenly turned very white again, and muttered shakily: "Can it be? I don't exceed as others do. I swear I have taken less this month than ever before."

With the terror in his soul he stumbled toward the door and was moving out his hand to reach it, when it opened from the other side and Zyp, as meek and pure looking as a young saint, met him on the threshold.

Now, I had that morning, in the course of conversation with the changeling, touched upon Dr. Crackenthorpe and his weaknesses, and that ghostly mention of the bottle convinced me on the moment that only she could be responsible for the mystery—a revelation of impishness which, I need not say, delighted me. The method of her prank I may as well describe here. The embrasure for a fireplace in her room had never been fitted with a grate, and the hearthstone itself was cracked and dislocated in a dozen places. By removing some of these fragments she had actually discovered a broken way into the chimney of the sitting room below, down which it was easy to slip a hollow rail of iron which with other lumber lay in the attic. This she had done, listened for her opportunity, and thereupon spoken the ominous words.

I think her appearance was the consummation of the doctor's terror, for a shuddering "Oh!" shook from his lips, and he seemed about to drop. And indeed she was somewhat like a spirit, with her wild white face looking

from a tangle of pheasant-brown hair and her solemn eyes like water glints in little wells of shadow.

She walked past the stricken man all stately, and then Modred and I jumped up and greeted her. At this the doctor's jaw dropped, but his trembling ceased and he watched us with injected eyes. Holding my two hands, Zyp looked coyly round, leaning backward.

"I love a tall man," she whispered; "he has more in him than a short one."

The doctor pulled himself together and came straggling across to the table.

"Who the pestilence is this?" he said, in a voice not yet quite under his command.

Zyp let go my hands and curtsied like a wild flower.

"Zyp, the orphan, good gentleman," she said; "shall I fill your pipe for you?"

It had fallen on the floor by the chimney, and she picked it up and went to him with a winning expression.

"Where is your tobacco, please?"

Mechanically he brought a round tin box from his pocket and handed it to her. Then it was a study in elfin coquetry to see the way in which she daintily coaxed the weed into the bowl and afterward sucking at the pipe stem with her determined little red lips to see if it drew properly. This done, she presented the mouthpiece to the doctor's consideration, as if it were a baby's "comforter."

"Now," she said, "sit down and I'll bring you your glass."

But at this the four of us, including Dr. Crackenthorpe, drew back. My father was no man to allow his pleasures to be encroached upon unbidden, and we three, at least, knew it as much as our skins were worth to offer practical hospitality in his absence.

Zyp looked at our faces and stamped her foot lively, with a toss of disdain.

"Where is the strong drink?" she said.

Modred tittered. "In that cupboard over the mantel shelf, if you must know," he said.

Zyp had the bottle out in a twinkling and a glass with

it. She poured out a stiff rummer, added water from a stone bottle on a corner shelf, and presented the grateful offering to the visitor, who had reseated himself by the table.

His scruples of conscience and discretion grew faint in the near neighborhood of the happy cordial. He seized the glass and impulsively took half the grog at a breath. Zyp clapped her hands joyfully, whereupon he clumped down the glass on the table with a dismayed look.

"Well," he said, "you're an odd little witch, upon my word. What Robin Goodfellow fathered you, I should like to know?"

"He's no father," said Zyp. "He's too full of tricks for a family man. I could tell you things of him."

"Tell us some then," said the doctor.

What Zyp would have answered I don't know, for at that moment my father walked into the room. If he had had what is vulgarly called a skinful, he was not drunk, for he moved steadily up to the little group at the table with a scowl contracting his forehead. The half-emptied tumbler had caught his eye immediately and he pointed to it. I was conscious that the doctor quaked a little.

"Pray make yourself at home," said my father, and caught up the glass and flung its contents in the other's face. In a moment the two men were locked in a savage, furious embrace, till, crashing over a chair, they were flung sprawling on the floor and apart. Before they could come together again Zyp alone of us had placed herself between them, fearless and beautiful, and had broken into a quaint little song:

"Smooth down her fur,
Rub sleep over her eyes,
Sweet, never stir.
Kiss down the coat of her
There, where she lies
On the bluebells."

She sung, and whether it was the music or the strangeness of the interruption, I shall never know; only the wonderful fact remains that, with the sound of her voice,

the great passion seemed to die out of the two foes and to give place to a pleasant conceit, comical in its way, that they had only been rollicking together.

"Well," said my father, without closer allusion to his brutality, "the liquor was choice Schiedam, and it's gone."

He sat down, called for another glass, helped himself to a noggin and pushed the bottle roughly across to Dr. Crackenthorpe, who had already reseated himself opposite.

"Sing again, girl," said my father, but Zyp shook her head.

"I never do anything to order," she said, "but the fairies move me to dance."

She blew out the lamp as she spoke and glided to a patch of light that fell from the high May moon through the window on to the rough boards of the room. Into this light she dipped her hands and then passed them over her hair and face as though she were washing herself in the mystic fountain of the night; and all the time her murmuring voice accompanied the action in little trills of laughter and words not understandable. Presently she fell to dancing, slowly at first and dividing her presence between glow and gloom; but gradually the supple motion of her body increased, step by step, until she was footing it as wildly as a young hamadryad to her own leaping shadow on the floor.

Suddenly she sprung from the moonlit square, danced over to Dr. Crackenthorpe and, whispering awfully in his ear, "Beware the demon that sits in the bottle," ran from the room.

My father burst into a fit of laughter, but I think from that day the doctor fully hated her.

CHAPTER V.

A TERRIBLE INTERVIEW.

Zyp had been with us a month, and surely never did changeling happen into a more congenial household.

Jason she still held at arm's length, which, despite my admiration of my brother, I secretly congratulated my heart on, for—let me get over it at the outset—from first to last, I have never wavered in my passion of love for this wild, beautiful creature. The unexpectedness of her coming alone was a romance, the delight of which has never palled upon me with the deadening years. Therefore it was that I early made acquaintance with the demon of jealousy, than whom none, in truth, is more irresistible in his unclean strength and hideousness.

Zyp and I were one day wandering under the shadow of the mighty old cathedral of Winton.

"I don't like it, Renny," she said, pressing up close to me. "It's awful and its grand, but there are always faces at the windows when I look up at them."

"Whose?" I said, with a laugh.

"I don't know," she said; "but think of the thousands of old monks and things whose home it was once and whose ghosts are shut up among the stones. There!" she cried, pointing.

I looked at the old leaded window she indicated, but could see nothing.

"His face is like stone and he's beckoning," she whispered. "Oh, come along, Renny"—and she dragged me out of the grassy yard and never stopped hurrying me on till we reached the meadows. Here her gayety returned to her, and she fell at home among the flowers at once.

Presently we wandered into a grassy covert against a hedge on the further side of which a road ran, and

threw ourselves among the "sauce alone" and wild parsley that grew there. Zyp was in one of her softest moods and my young heart fluttered within me. She leaned over me as I sat and talked to me in a low voice, with her fair young brow gone into wrinkles of thoughtfulness.

"Renny, what's love that they talk about?"

I laughed and no doubt blushed.

"I mean," she said, "is it blue eyes and golden hair or brown eyes and brown hair? Don't be silly, little boy, till you know what I mean."

"Well, what do you mean, Zyp?"

"I want to know, that's all. Renny, do you remember my asking to kiss and be friends that day we first met, and your refusing?"

"Yes, Zyp," I stammered.

"You may kiss me now, if you like," and she let herself drop into my arms, as I sat there, and turned up her pretty cheek to my mouth.

My blood surged in my ears. I was half-frightened, but all with a delicious guilt upon me. I bent hastily and touched the soft pink curve with my trembling lips.

She lay quite still a moment, then sat up and gently drew away from me.

"No," she said, "that isn't it. Shall I ever know, I wonder?"

"Know what, Zyp?"

"Never mind, for I shan't tell you. There, I didn't mean to be rude," and she stroked the sleeve of my jacket caressingly.

By and by she said: "I wonder if you will suffer, Renny, poor boy? I would save you all if I could, for you're the best of them, I believe."

Her very words were so inexplicable to me that I could only sit and stare at her. I have construed them since, with a knife through my heart for every letter.

As we were sitting silent a little space, steps sounded down the road and voices with them. They were of two men, who stopped suddenly, as they came over against us, hidden behind the hedge, as if to clinch some argu-

ment, but we had already recognized the contrary tones of my father and Dr. Crackenthorpe.

"Now, harkee!" the doctor was saying; "that's well and good, but I'm not to be baffled forever and a day, Mr. Ralf Trender. What does it all amount to? You've got something hidden up your sleeve and I want to know what it is."

"Is that all?" My father spoke in a set, deep manner.

"That's all, and enough."

"Then, look up my sleeve, Dr. Crackenthorpe—if you can."

"I don't propose to look. I suggest that you just shake it, when no doubt the you-know-whats will come tumbling out."

"And if I refuse?"

"There are laws, my friend, laws—iniquitous, if you like; but, for what they are, they don't recognize the purse on the highway as the property of him that picks it up."

"And how are you going to set these laws in motion?"

"We'll insert the end of the wedge first—say in some public print, now. How would this look? We have it on good authority that Mr. Trender, our esteemed fellow-townsmen, is the lucky discoverer of——"

"Be silent, you!" My father spoke fiercely; then added in a low tone: "D'ye wish all the world to know?"

"Not by any means," said the other, quietly, "and they shan't if you fall in with my mood."

"If I only once had your head in the mill wheel," groaned my father, with a curse. "Now, harken! I don't put much value on your threat; but this I'll allow that I court no interference with my manner of life. Take the concession for what it is worth. Come to me by and by and you shall have another."

"A couple," said the doctor.

"Very well—no more, though I rot for it—and take my blessing with them."

"When shall I come?" said the doctor, ignoring the very equivocal benediction.

"Come to-night—no, to-morrow," said my father, and turning on his heel strode heavily off toward the town.

I heard the doctor chuckling softly with a malignant triumph in his note.

I clenched my teeth and fists and would have risen had not Zyp noiselessly prevented me. It was wormwood to me; the revelation that, for some secret cause, my father, the strong, irresistible and independent, was under the thumb of an alien. But the doctor walked off and I fell silent.

On our homeward way we came across Jason lying on his back under a tree, but he took no notice of us nor answered my call, and Zyp stamped her foot when I offered to delay and speak to him. Nevertheless I noticed that more than once she looked back, as long as he was in view, to see if he was moved to any curiosity as to our movements, which he never appeared to be in the least.

Great clouds had been gathering all the afternoon, and now the first swollen drops of an advancing thunderstorm spattered in the dust outside the yard. Inside it was as dark as pitch, and I had almost to grope my way along the familiar passages. Zyp ran away to her own den.

Suddenly, with a leap of the blood, I saw that some faintly pallid object stood against the door of the room of silence as I neared it. It was only with an effort I could proceed, and then the thing detached itself and was resolved into the white face of my brother Modred.

"Is that you, Renny?" he said, in a loud, tremulous voice.

"Yes," I answered, very shakily myself. "What in the name of mystery are you doing there?"

"I feel queer," he said. "Let's get to the light somewhere."

We made our way to the back, opened the door leading on to the little platform and stood looking at the stringed rain. Modred's face was ghastly and his eyes were awakened to an expression that I had never thought them capable of.

"You've been in there?" I said.

"Yes," he whispered.

"More fool you. If you like to tempt the devil you should have the brass to outface him. Why, you've got it!" I cried, for he suddenly let fall from his trembling hand a little round glittering object, whose nature I could not determine in the stormy twilight.

He had it in his clutch again in a moment, though I pounced for it, and then he backed through the open doorway.

"Its naught that concerns you," he said; "keep off, you beast!"

"What is it?" I cried.

"Water-parings," said he, and clapped to the door in my face as I rushed at him, and I heard him scuttle upstairs. The latch caught me in the chest and knocked my breath out for a bit, so that I was unable to follow, and probably he ran and bolted himself into his bedroom. In any case, I had no mind for pursuit, my heart being busy with other affairs; and there I remained and thought them out. Presently, being well braced to the ordeal, I went indoors and upstairs to the living room, where I was persuaded I should find my father. And there he sat, pretty hot with drink and with a comfortless, glowering devil in his eyes.

"Well!" he thundered, "what do you want?"

I managed to get out, with some firmness, "A word with you, dad," though his eyes disquieted me.

"Make it one, then, and a quick one!"

"Zyp and I were sitting behind a hedge this afternoon when you and Dr. Crackenthorpe were at words on the other side."

His eyes shriveled me, but the motion of his lips seemed to signify to me that I was to go on.

"Dad, if he has any hold over you, let me share the bother and help if I can."

He had sat with his right hand on the neck of the bottle from which he had been drinking, and he now flung the latter at me, with a snarl like that of a mad dog. Fortunately for me, in the very act some flash of impulse unnerved him, so that the bottle spun up to the ceiling and crashed down again to the floor, from which the

scattered liquor sent up a pungent, sickening odor. Then he leaped to his feet and yelled at me. I could make nothing of his words, save that they clashed into one another in a torrent of furious invective. But in the midst his voice stopped, with a vibrating snap; he put his hand to his forehead, which, I saw with horror, was suddenly streaked with purple, and down he sunk to the floor in a heap.

I was terribly frightened, and, running to him, endeavored in a frantic manner to pull him into a sitting posture. I had half succeeded, when, lying propped up against the leg of the table, he gave a groan and bade me in a weak voice to let him be; and presently to my joy I saw the natural color come back to his face by slow degrees. By and by he was able to slide into the chair he had left, where he lay panting and exhausted, but recovering.

"Renalt, my lad," he said, in a dragging voice, "what was that you said just now? Let's have it again."

I hesitated, but he smiled at me and bade me not to fear. Thus encouraged, I repeated my statement.

"Ah," he said; "and the girl—did she hear?"

"She couldn't help it, dad. But she can't have noticed much, for she never even referred to it afterward."

"Which looks bad, and so much for your profound knowledge of the sex."

He looked at me keenly for some moments from under his matted eyebrows; then muttered as if to himself:

"Here's a growing lad, and loyal, I believe. What if I took him a yard into my confidence?"

"Oh, yes, dad," I said, eagerly. "You can trust me, indeed you can. I only want to be of some use."

He slightly shook his head, then seemed to wake up all of a sudden.

"There," he said; "be off, like a good boy, and don't worry me a second time. You meant well, and I'm not offended."

"Yes, dad," I said a little sadly, and was turning to go, when he spoke to me again:

"And if the girl should mention this matter—you know what—to you, say what I tell you now—that Dr. Crack-

enthorpe thinks your father can tell him where more coins are to be found like the one I gave him that night; but that your father can't and is under no obligation to Dr. Crackenthorpe—none whatever."

So I left him, puzzled, a little depressed, but proud to be the recipient of even this crumb of confidence on the part of so reserved and terrible a man.

Still I could not but feel that there was something inconsistent in his words to me and those I had heard him address to the doctor. Without a doubt his utterances on the road had pointed to a certain recognition of the necessity of bribing the other to silence.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NIGHT BEFORE.

Full of dissatisfaction I wandered into the shed and loitered aimlessly about. As I stood there Jason came clattering homeward, his coat collar turned up and his curly head bowed to the deluge.

"So you got home before me?" he said, shaking himself and squeezing his cap out as he spoke.

"Yes; we came straight."

"It was lovely in the meads, wasn't it?" said he, with an odd glance at me.

"It's been lovely all this May," said I.

"And that means a fat churchyard. Old Rottengoose says: 'A cold May and windy makes a full barn and findy.' A queer one, old Peg is. She'd die if she cast a woolen before the first of June. I wonder what she'd think of sitting under a hedge in a northeaster?"

I started a little and shot a look askance at my brother. Could he have seen us? But his next words reassured me.

"Or of falling asleep in the shade, as I did, till the rain on my face woke me up."

"Then you didn't see us pass——" I began and stopped.

"See what? I saw nothing but my eyelids and the sky through 'em."

I gave a sigh of relief. My feelings toward Zyp were boyish and bashful and innocent enough, heaven knows; but in the shadow of my rough past they were beginning to glimmer out so strange and sweet that the merest suspicion of their incurring publicity filled me with a shame-faced terror of ridicule that was agony.

Freed from this dread, I fell into an extreme of garrulity that landed me in a quagmire of discomfiture.

After I had thus talked for a while, rather disconnectedly, he interrupted me.

"Renny," he said, "you're pretty fond of the girl, aren't you?"

I heard him with a little shock of surprise.

"Not that I care," he went on, airily, "except for your sake, old boy."

"What do you mean?" I said.

"We're up to a thing or two, aren't we?" said he, "but she's fifty tricks to our one."

"She has her good points, Jason."

"Oh, yes; lots of them. So many that it hardly seems worth while noticing her setting you up against me."

"She's never done anything of the sort!" I cried, hotly.

"Hasn't she? Well, that's all right, and we can be chums again. I only wanted to warn you against putting faith in a chit that can wear a new face easier than her dress, to you, or Modred, or—or any one."

"Modred!" I cried, in astonishment.

"Oh, don't suppose," he said, "that you're sole lord of her heart."

"I never did suppose it," I answered, thickly. "Why should I? She's free to fancy whom she likes"—but my heart sunk within me.

"Yes; that's the way to look at it," he said. "You wouldn't think she could find much to admire in that fatty, now, would you?"

"How do you know she does?"

"I do know—that's enough."

"Well, isn't he a sort of brother to her?" I said—with a courageous effort—"as we all are."

"Of course. That's it."

"And I don't know what you mean by 'any one' else."

"Don't you?" He laughed and flung away a stone he had been idly playing with. "Well, I meant Modred, or—or any one else."

"Who else?"

"Dad, say—or Dr. Crackenthorpe."

"Oh, you're an idiot!" I cried; "I won't talk to you"—and I left him and ran indoors.

But he had driven the sting home and the poison already worked furiously in me. How can I explain why? It was true, what he had said, every word of it. She had set me against him, Jason—not in words, but by a tacit conviction of him as one who had of his own act bared his soul momentarily, and revealed a sinister brand across it hitherto unguessed at.

Well, this was the first waking from the boyish dream, and should I ever dream it again? I had said we were all in a manner her brothers, and that she was free to smile on whom she chose. What a pitiful handful of dust for all eyes but my own! I felt the passion of longing for her single love surge in me as I spoke. I had never till that moment dreamed of combating another for possession of it. She had seemed mine by right of fortune's gift from the first, nor had she by her behavior appeared to question the right. We had confidences, discussions, little secrets together, which none but we might share in. We walked and talked and leaned toward one another, with a sense of mutual understanding that was pathetic, I am sure—at least as to my share in it—in God's eyes.

And now to find that all the time she was on like secret terms with Modred—with Jason, too, perhaps, judging by his sidelong innuendoes, though it made my heart sick to think that she could play so double faced a game between me and one whom she professed to hate and despise.

What a drama of dolls it was! And how soon the drama was to turn into a tragedy!

I went indoors and upstairs to the room which Jason and I shared and flung myself on the bed. Then I was properly shocked and horrified to find that my cheeks were suddenly wet with tears—a humiliating discovery for a tough-sinewed young barbarian to make. What an admirable sight, indeed! Renalt Trender, sniffing and snuffling for a girl's favor!

Pride, however, is everywhere indigenous, and this came to my assistance. If the minx played sham with me I would meet her with her own tactics and affect indifference. What a triumphant picture this:

Zyp—"Why have you been different to me of late, Renny? Aren't you fond of me now?"

Renny—"My good little Zyp, the fact is I have tired a bit of the novelty. It has been my first experience of the society of a girl, you know, and very pleasant while it lasted; but I confess to a little longing for a resumption of the old independence and freedom. Perhaps some day again we will walk and converse together as of old."

Atop of this imaginary question and answer rose a smugly anguishing picture of Zyp flushed and in tears (my imagination insisted on these in bucketsful, to out-flood my own temporary weakness); of Zyp hurt and sorrowing, but always striving by every means in her power to win back my lost favor.

Alas, poor little clown! I fear it is just those who have the fancy to conjure up such pictures who suffer most cruelly from the non-realization of the hopes of youth. Braced to the test, however, and not knowing myself in weak armor, I came down to supper that evening prickling all through with resolve.

Jason was in the room alone, as I entered, and was walking feverishly up and down.

"Hist!" he said, softly, seizing me by the arm; "come here and look for yourself."

He dragged me to the little square window, which was

open. It looked out at the back, and beneath was the railed platform before mentioned.

I knew that I was urged to act the spy, and yet—so demoralizing is jealousy—like a dog I went. Softly we craned our necks through the opening and looked down. Trees all about here bordered the river banks, so as to make the rear of our mill quite secret and secluded.

She, Zyp, was standing on the platform with her arm round Modred's neck. She seemed trying to coax something from him which he was reluctant to part with. As he evaded her efforts I saw what it was—the little round yellow object I had noticed in his hand earlier in the afternoon.

"Darling," she said, in a subdued voice, "do let me have it."

He laughed and looked at her loutishly.

"You know the condition, Zyp."

"I have let you kiss me over and over again."

"But you haven't kissed me yet."

She stamped her foot. "Nor ever shall!" she cried.

"Then here goes," he said, and slipped it into his pocket.

At that she rushed at him and wound her arms about him like a young panther.

"Shall I tear you with my teeth?" she said, but instead she smoothed his face with one hand disengaged and murmured to him:

"Modred, dear, you got it for me, you know; you said so."

"And precious frightened I was, Zyp."

"Well, it is mine, isn't it?"

"If you give me the kiss."

My father's step on the stairs brought our heads in with a clatter. We heard them scuttle into the house, and a moment later they appeared in the room. Modred's face was flushed and bore a heavy, embarrassed expression, but Zyp looked quite cool and self-possessed.

I took no notice of her during the meal, but talked, daring in my misery, to my father, who condescended to

answer me now and again, and I could see that she wondered at me.

Supper over, I hurried to my room, and shutting myself in, went and sat by the window and gave my tormented soul to the night. Had I never met Zyp, I doubt if I should ever in my manhood have realized what the grown-up, I think, seldom do, the amount of torture and wrong the young heart may endure without bursting—with no hope of sympathy, moreover, except that half-amused tolerant form of it which the old think it sufficient to extend to youth's elastic grievances.

By and by Jason stole in. For some little time he sat upon his bed, silent; then he said in a soft voice:

"Let's cry quits, Renny. I think I've paid you out for that little accident of the meads."

"I hate you!" I said, quietly, and indeed it seemed to me that his cruelty deserved no better a reward.

He laughed, and was silent again, and presently began to undress for bed, whistling softly all the time.

I took no notice of him; but long after when he was breathing peacefully asleep, I laid my own aching head, tired with misery, on the pillow, and tried to follow his example. I was not to succeed until faint daylight came through the casement and the birds were twittering outside—was never, indeed, to know sleep in its innocence again.

CHAPTER VII.

THE POOL OF DEATH.

Morning brought a pitcher of comfort with it on its gossamer wings. Who, at 17, can wake from restoring sleep to find the June sun on his face and elect to breakfast on bitter wormwood, with the appetizing fry of good country bacon caressing his nostrils through every chink of the boards? Indeed, I was not born to hate, or to any decided vice or virtue, but was of those who, taking a

middle course, are kicked to the wall or into the gutter as the Fates have a fancy.

I was friendly with myself, with Jason—almost with Zyp, who had so bedeviled me. After all, I thought, the measure of her regard for me might be more in a winning friendliness than in embraces such as she had bestowed upon Modred.

Therefore I dressed in good heart, chatting amiably with Jason, who, I could not help noticing, was at some pains to study me curiously.

Such reactionary spirits are the heritage of youth. They decline with the day. My particular relapse happened, maybe, ungenerously early, for it was at breakfast I noticed the first tremulous vibrations of Zyp's war trumpet. Clearly she had guessed the reason of the change in my manner toward her yesterday evening and was bent upon disabusing my mind of the presumptuous supposition that I held any monopoly whatsoever of her better regard. To this end she showered exaggerated attentions upon Modred and my father—even Jason coming in for his share. She had little digs at my silence and boorishness that hugely delighted the others. She slipped a corner of fat bacon into my tea and spilled salt over my bread and jam, and all the time I had to bear my suffering with a stoic heart and echo the merriment, which I did in such sardonic fashion as to call down fresh banter for my confusion. At our worst, it must be confessed, we were not a circle with a refined sense of humor. But when we rose, and Zyp brushed rudely by me with a pert toss of her head, I felt indeed as if life no longer held anything worth the striving after.

I walked out into the yard to be alone, but Jason followed me. Some tenderness for old comradeship sake stirred in him momentarily, I think, for his blue eyes were good as they met mine.

"What an ass you are, Renny," he said; "to make such a to-do about the rubbish!"

"I don't know what you mean," I said, in miserable resentment. "I'm making no to-do about anything."

My chest felt like a stone, and I could have struck him or any one.

"Oh, I can see," said he.

"See what you like," I replied, furiously, "but don't bother me with it. I've nothing to do with your fancies."

"Oh, very well," he said, coolly; "I don't want to interfere, I'm sure."

I bounced past him and strode out of the yard. My blood was humming in my veins; the sunny street looked all glazed with a shining gray. I walked on and on, scarcely knowing whither I went. Presently I climbed St. Catherine's hill and flung myself down on the summit. Below me, a quarter of a mile away, the old city lay in the hollow cup of its down. Who, of all its 17,000 souls, could ever stir my pulses as the little stranger from the distant shadowy forest could? We had no forests round Winton. Perhaps if we had the spirit of the trees would have colored my life, too, so that I might have scorned "the blind bow-god's butt shaft."

No doubt I was young to make such capital out of a little boyish disappointment. Do you think so? Then to you I must not appeal. Oh, my friend! We are not all jack-o'-lanterns at 17, and the fire of unrequited affection may burn fiercer in the pure air of youth than in the vitiated atmosphere of manhood. Anyhow believe me that to me my misery was very real and dreadful. Think only, you who have plucked the fruit and found it bitter—you whose disenchantment of life did not begin till life itself was waning—what it must be to feel hopeless at that tender age.

All day long I lay on the hill or wandered about the neighboring downs, and it was not till the shadows of the trees were stretching that I made up my mind to return and face out the inevitable.

I was parched and feverish, and the prospect of a plunge in the river on my way home came to me with a little lonely thrill as of solace to my unhappiness.

There was a deep pool at a bend of the stream, not far from where Zyp and I had sat yesterday afternoon (was it only yesterday?) which we three were much in

the habit of frequenting on warm evenings; and thither I bent my steps. This part of the water lay very private and solitary, and was only to be reached by trespassing from the road through a pretty thick-set blackthorn hedge—a necessity to its enjoyment which, I need not say, was an attraction to us.

As I wriggled through our individual “run” in the hedge and, emerging on the other side, raised my face, I saw that a naked figure was already seated by the side of the running pool, which I was not long in identifying as Modred’s.

I hesitated. What reason had I for hobnobbing with mine enemy, as, in the bitterness of my heart, I called him? I could not as yet speak to him naturally, I felt, or meet him without resentment. Where was the object in complicating matters? I turned, on the thought, to go, and again hesitated. Should he see me before I had made my escape, would he not attribute it to embarrassment on my part and crow triumphant over my discomfiture? Ah, why did I not act on my first impulse? Why, why? The deeps of perdition must resound with that forlorn little word.

When a second time the good resolve came to me, it was too late. He rose and saw me and, under his shading hand, even at that distance, I could mark the silent grin of mockery on his face. I walked deliberately toward him, my hands in my pockets, my cap shading my eyes.

“Aren’t you coming to bathe?” he said, when I drew near. “It’ll cool your temper.”

I could have struck him, but I answered nothing and only began to undress.

“Where have you been all day? We were wondering, Zyp and I, as we lay in the meadow out there.”

Still I answered nothing, but I knew that my hands trembled as I pulled off my coat and waistcoat.

He stood watching me a little while in silence, then said: “You seem to have lost your tongue, old Renny. Has it followed your heart because Zyp talks for two?”

I sprung up, but he eluded me and, with a hateful

laugh, leaped on the moment into the deep center of the pool. A horrible tightness came round my throat. Half-undressed as I was I plunged after him all mad with passion. He rose near me, and seeing the fury of my face, dived again, and I followed. It took but an instant, and my life was wrecked. We met among the weeds at the bottom, and he jumped from me. As he rose I clutched him by one foot, and swiftly passed a great sinew of weed three or four times around his ankle. It held like a grapnel and would hold; for, though he was a fair swimmer, he was always frightened and nervous in the face of little difficulties. Then swerving away, I rose again, with laboring lungs, to the surface.

Barely had my drenched eyes found the daylight again, when the hideous enormity of my crime broke into my brain like the toll of a death bell. The water near me was heaving slightly and some welling bubbles swayed to the surface. They were the drowning gasps of my brother—my own brother, whom I was murdering.

I gave a thin, wretched scream and sunk again into the deep hole beneath me. He was jerking convulsively, and his hands clutched vainly at his feet and slipped away in a dying manner. I tore at the weed to unwind it—only to twist it into new fetters. I pulled frantically at its roots. I felt that I should go mad if it did not yield. In a moment it came away in my hands and I shot upward, struggling. But the other poor body followed me sluggishly, and I seized it by the hair, with all my heart gone crazy, and towed it ashore.

His face, I thought, looked fallen away already and was no longer loutish or malicious. It seemed just a white, pathetic thing freed from suffering—and I would have given my life—ay, and my love—ten times over to see the same expression come back to it it had worn as it turned to me before he dived.

I fell on my knees beside him and broke into a passion of tears. I kissed, with no shame but a murderer's, the wet forehead, and beat and pressed, in a futile agony too terrible for words, the limp unresisting hand against my breast. It seemed that he must wake if I implored him

so frantically. But he lay quiet, with closed eyes, and the water ran from his white skin in trickling jerks and pauses.

In the midst of my useless anguish some words of Jason's recurred to me, and, seizing my coat for a pillow to his forehead, I turned him, with a shuddering horror of his limpness, upon his face. A great gush of water came with a rumble from his mouth, but he did not stir; and there I stood looking down upon him, my hand to my forehead, my mad eyes staring as Cain's must have stared when he wrought the deed of terror.

And I was Cain—I who yesterday was a boy of loving impulses, I think; whose blackest crime might be some petty rebellion against the lesser proprieties; who had even hugged himself upon living on a loftier plane than this poor silenced victim of his brutality.

As the deadly earnest of my deed came home to my stunned mind, I had no thought of escape. I would face it out, confess and die. My father's agony—for he loved us in his way, I believe; Jason's condemnation; Zyp's hatred; my own shame and torture—I put them all on one side to get full view of that black crossbeam and rope that I felt to be the only medicine for my sick and haunted soul.

As I stood, the sound of wheels on the road beyond woke me to some necessity of action. Stumbling, as in a nightmare; not feeling my feet, but only the mechanical spring of motion, I hurried to the hedge side and looked over.

A carter with a tilt wagon was urging his tired team homeward.

"Help!" I cried. "Oh, come and help me!" And my voice seemed to me to issue from under the tilt of the wagon.

He "woa'd" up his horses, raised his hat from his forehead, wrinkled with hot weariness, and came toward me, his whip over his shoulder.

"What's toward?" said he.

"My brother!" I gasped. "We were bathing together and he's drowned."

The man's boorish face lighted up like a farthing rush-light. Here was something horribly sordid enough for all the excitement he was worth. It would sweeten many a pot of swipes for the week to come.

"Wheer be the body?" said he, eagerly.

"Over yonder, on the grass. Oh, won't you help me to carry it home?"

He looked at the hedge critically.

"Go, you," he said, "and drag 'en hither. We'll gat 'en over hedge together."

I ran back to where it lay. It had collapsed a little to one side, and for an instant my breath caught in a wild thrill of hope that he had moved of himself. But the waxen hue of the face in the gathering dusk killed my emotion on its very issuing.

A strange loathing of the thing, lying so unresponsive, had in my race backward and forward sprung upon me, but before it could gain the mastery I had seized it under the arm-pits and was half-dragging, half-carrying it toward the road.

I was at the hedge before I knew it, and the red face of the carter was peering curiously down at the white heap beneath.

"Harned 'en up," he said. "My, but it's cold. Easy, now. Take the toes of 'en. Thart's it—woa!" and he had it in his strong arms and shuffling heavily to the rear of his wagon, jerked back the flap of the tilt with his elbow and slid the body like a package into the interior.

"Get your coat, man," he cried, "and coom away."

I had forgotten in the terror of it all my own half-dressed state, for I had stripped only to my underclothes, and my boots were still on my feet. Mechanically I returned to the riverside, and hastily donning my coat and trousers, snatched up the other's tumbled garments and ran back to the road.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WAKING.

The carter was holding the curtain back and critically apostrophizing the thing within.

"Ay, he be sound enough. Reckon nought but the last trump'll waken yon. Now, youngster, where may you live?"

I told him.

"Sure," he said, "the old crazed mill?" Then I thought he muttered: "Well, 'tis one vermin the less," but I was not sure and nothing mattered—nothing.

He asked me if I would like to ride with it inside. The mere suggestion was terror to me, and I stammered out that I would rather walk, for I had tried my best already and had given up hope.

So we set off slowly through the dumb, haunted twilight. Thoughts would not come to me in any definite form. I imagined the cathedral bells were ringing, till I found it was only a jangling in my brain, discordant and unearthly. People came toward us who on nearing were resolved into distorted rags of mist; voices croaked with laughter, and they were only the swung branches of trees.

Suddenly I heard an exclamation—real enough this time—and saw the carter run to the head of his team and stop them.

"Woa, then!" he cried, in a frightened voice; and then with terrified impatience: "Coom hither, marn; I tell 'ee. Don't 'ee stand theer gawking at the air. Dang it, the ghost walks!" He stamped his heavy foot, seeing me motionless; then cried again: "Take thee foul burden out o' the wain and dang me for a fool ever to have meddled wi't!"

A gush of wondrous hope flooded my breast. I tore

to the rear of the wagon, dashed back the curtain—and there was Modred sitting up and swaying feebly from side to side.

I leaped; I caught him in my arms; my breath came in laughter and sobs. "Oh, Modred, Modred!" I cried. "I didn't mean it—it wasn't me—I'm not like that!" and then I broke down and wept long and convulsively, though I would never let him out of my clutch.

"Where am I?" he said, faintly; "oh, it hurts so. Every vein in my body is bursting with pain."

At this I beat under my hysterical outburst and set to rubbing him all over in frantic eagerness. It seemed to ease him a little and I blessed him that he lay passively against me and did not offer to push me away. Poor fellow, he was far too weak as yet for any resistance.

Presently I heard the carter bawl in tremulous tones: "Art gone, the two of 'ee?"

"Come here," I called back, with a tearful laugh. "He's better; he's recovered!"

The fellow came round gingerly and stood a little distance off.

"Eh?" he said, dubiously.

"See for yourself!" I cried. "He wasn't drowned after all. He's come round!"

The man spat viciously in the road and came sullenly forward. He was defrauded of an excitement and he felt the injury grievously.

"You young varmint!" he growled. "Them's your tricks for to get a free lift."

"Nonsense!" I said, buoyantly; "you yourself thought him dead. Carry us on to the mill and I'll promise you a proper skinful of liquor."

He was crabbed and undecided, but presently he went forward and whipped up his horses with a surly oath. As the wagon pitched, Modred opened his eyes, which he had shut, and looked up at me.

"Are you feeling better, old boy?" I said, tenderly.

"The pain isn't so bad, but I'm tired to death," said he.

"Rest, and don't talk. You'll be stronger in a bit."

He closed his eyes again and I tried to shield him as much as I could from the jolting. I had already wrapped him up warm in some old sacks that were heaped in a corner of the wagon. So all the way home I held him, counting his every breath, loving him as I had never done before.

It was dark when we reached the mill and I laid him gently back and leaped down.

"Dad! Dad!" I shouted, running down the yard and into the house; but he was already standing at the head of the stairs, with a candle in his hand.

"Modred's had an accident!" I cried, in a subdued voice—I could not keep the lie back. It seemed so dreadful at the outset to confess and stand aside condemned—while others helped. Jason and Zyp came out on the landing and my father ran down the stairs hurriedly.

"What's that?" he said—"Modred!"

"He got caught in the weeds and was nearly drowned, but he's getting better."

"Where is he?" He seized me by the arm as he spoke, and dragged me to the mill door. I could feel the pulses in his finger tips through my coat.

"He's in a wain outside, and I promised the man a long drink for bringing us home."

"There's a full bottle in the cupboard—bring it down," shouted my father to Jason. Then he hurried to the wagon and lifted out the breathing figure and looked into its face. After all, it was his youngest.

"Not much harm, perhaps," said he. "Run and tell them to heat some water and the blankets."

While I was finding old Peg and explaining and giving the order, they carried him upstairs. I did not dare follow them, but, the reaction over, leaned, feeling sick and faint, in the passage outside the little kitchen. Perhaps even now he was telling them, and I dreaded more than I can describe the sentence which a first look at any one of their faces might confirm.

Presently old Peg came out to me with a can of boil-

ing water and flung an armful of warm blankets over my shoulder.

"There's for you, Renalt," she cried in her thin, rusty voice; then muttered, clawing her hips like a monkey: "'Tis flying in the Lord's face o' Providence, to me a old woman; like as restoring a froze snake on the hearth."

I had no heart for retort, but sped from the sinister old witch with my burden. I saw Zyp and Jason in the living-room as I passed, but, though they called to me, I ran on and upstairs to the door of Modred's room, which was next ours.

My father came out to my knock and took the things from me.

"Now," said he, "I want nobody here but myself and Dr. Crackenthorpe. Go you and fetch him, if he's to be found."

Happy to be employed in any useful service, I hurried away on my errand. The door of the sitting-room was shut, at which I was glad. Very little respite gave me fresh lease of hope.

The doctor's home was close by, in a straggling street of old buildings that ran off our end of the High street, and the doctor himself was, I was told, within.

I found him seated in a musty little parlor, with some ugly casts of murderers' heads facing him from the top of a varnished bookcase.

"Ah, my friend!" he screeched, cracking his knuckles; "those interest you, eh? Well, perhaps I shall have the pleasure of adding your picture to them some day."

An irrepressible shudder took me and he laughed, not knowing the reason of it.

"Now, what's your business?" said he.

I told him.

"Eh," he said, and bent forward and looked at me narrowly. "Near drowned, eh? Why, what were you doing, you young limb?"

"I went after him," I answered, faintly, "but I couldn't get the weeds loose."

"Dressed, too?" he said, for the sop of my underclothes had come through the upper, and nothing es-

caped his hawk's eye; "why, you're a hero, upon my word."

He bade me begone after that and he would follow immediately. And I returned to the mill, and, softly climbing the stairs, shut myself into my room and sat upon the edge of the bed listening—listening for every breath and sound in the old eerie house. I heard the doctor come up the stairs and enter the room next door. I heard the low murmur of voices and strained my ears to gather what was said, but could not make out a word. And the darkness grew into my soul and shut out all the old light of happy reason. Should I ever feel innocent again? And would Modred, satisfied with his knowledge of the dreadful heritage of remorse I had laid up for myself, forego his right to denounce me and to forever make me an outcast and alone? I hardly dared to hope it, yet clung with a strenuous longing to thought of his mercy.

It may have been hours I sat there. I do not know. I had heard footsteps go up and down the stairs many times. And then a silence fell. What was the meaning of it? Was it possible that life had only rallied in him momentarily, like the flame of a dying candle and had suddenly sunk for good and all into endless darkness? Had he told? Why did no one come near me? I could stand it no longer.

As I sprung to my feet I heard a footstep again on the stairs and Jason walked into the room and shut the door. He took no notice of me, but began to undress.

"Jason!" I cried, and the agony in my voice I could not repress. "How is he? Has he spoken? Oh, don't keep me in this torture."

"What torture?" said my brother, looking at me with a cold, unresponsive eye. "Why should you be upset more than the rest of us? He's asleep all right, and not to be bothered with any questions."

Thank God! Oh, thank God! I took no notice of his looks or tone, for I was absorbed in great gratitude to heaven that my worst fears were idle ones.

"Where's dad?" I said.

"Drinking downstairs with the doctor. They'll make high revel of it, I expect."

He was already in bed; but I sat on and on in the darkness. I had only one thought—one longing to wait till Jason was fast in slumber, and then to creep to Modred's side and implore his forgiveness.

Presently the deep, regular breathing of my brother announced to me the termination of my vigil. With my heart beating in a suffocating manner, I stole to the door, opened it and stood outside that of Modred's room. I listened a moment. A humming noise of garrulous voices below was the only sound that broke the silence of the house. Softly I turned the handle and softly crept into the room. There was light in it, for on the wash hand stand a rush candle burned dimly in an old lantern.

He gave a start, for he was lying awake in his bed, then half-rose on his elbow and looked at me with frightened eyes.

"Don't come near," he whispered. "What do you want? You aren't going to try to kill me again?"

I gave a little strangled, agonized cry, and, dropping on my knees where I stood, stretched out my arms to him imploringly.

"Oh, Modred, don't! Don't! You can't think I meant it! It was only a horrible impulse. I was mad, and I nearly drowned myself directly afterward in saving you."

The fright went from his face and something like its familiar look returned to it.

"Are you sorry?" he said.

"Sorry? Oh, I will do anything you like if you will only believe me."

"Come here, Renny," he said, "and stand by me. I want to see you better."

I obeyed humbly—lovingly.

"You want me to forgive you?"

"If you could, Modred—if you only could."

"And not to peach?"

I hung my head in shame and the tears were in my eyes again.

"Well, I'll agree, on one condition."

"Make any you like, Modred. I'll swear to keep it; I'll never forget it."

"Zyp's it," he said, looking away from me.

"Yes," I said, gently, with a prescience of what was coming.

"You'll have to give her up for good and all—keep out of her way; let her know somehow you're sick of her. And keep Jason out of the way. You and he were chums enough before she came."

"I swear for myself, and to do what I can with Jason," I said, dully. What did it matter? One way or another the buoyant light of existence was shut to me for good and all.

"It's the only way," said Modred, and he gave me a look that I dare not call crafty. "After all, it isn't much," he said, "considering what you did to me, and she seems to be getting tired of you—now, doesn't she?"

"Yes," I said in a low voice.

"Then, that's settled. And now let me be, for I feel as if I can sleep. Hand me my breeches first, though. There's something in the pocket I want."

"Shall I get it out for you, old boy?"

"No, no!" he answered, hurriedly. "Give them to me, can't you?"

I did as he wanted and crept from the room. What did it matter? Zyp had already cast me off, but for the evil deed I was respited. A moment ago the girl had seemed as nothing, set in the scale against my brother's forgiveness. Could it be the true, loving spirit of forgiveness that could make such a condition? Hush! I must not think that thought. What did it matter?

I did not go back to my room, but sat on a stair at the head of the downward flight, with a strange, stunned feeling. Below the voices went on spasmodically—now a long murmur—now a snatch of song—now an angry phrase. By and by, I think, I must have fallen into a sort of stupor, for I seemed to wake all at once to a thunderous uproar.

I started to my feet. Magnified as all sounds are in the moment of recovered consciousness, there was yet

noise enough below to convince me that a violent quarrel between the two men was toward. I heard my father's voice in bitter denunciation.

"You've been hawking over my quarry this long while. I'll tear the truth out of your long throat! Give me back my cameo—where is it?"

"A fig for your cameo!" cried the other in a shrill voice, "and I tell you this is the first I've heard of it."

"You've been watching me, you fiend, you! Dogging me—haunting me! I'll have no more o't! I'm not to be bribed or threatened or coaxed any more; least of all thieved from. Where is it?"

"You aren't, aren't you?" screeched the doctor. "You leave me here and I fall asleep. You're away and you come storming back that I've robbed you. It's a trap, by thunder, but you won't catch me in it!"

"I believe you're lying!" cried my father. His voice seemed strained with passion. But the other answered him now much more coolly.

"Believe what you like, my friend. It's beneath my dignity to contradict you again; but take this for certain—if you slander me in public, I'll ruin you!"

Then silence fell and I waited to hear no more. I stole to my room and crept to bed. I had never changed my drenched clothes and the deadly chill of my limbs was beginning to overcome the frost in my heart.

It seemed hours before the horrible coldness relaxed, and then straightway a parching fever scorched me as if I lay against a furnace. I heard sounds and dull footsteps and the ghostly creaking of stairs, but did not know if they were real or only incidents in my half-delirium.

At last as day was breaking I fell into a heavy, exhausted sleep. It merged into a dream of my younger brother. We walked together as we had done as little children, my arm around his neck. "Zenny," he said, like a baby paraphrasing Zyp's words, "what's 'ove dat 'ey talk about?" I could have told him in the gushing of my heart, but in a moment he ran from me and faded.

I gave a cry and woke, and Jason was standing over me, with a white, scared face.

"Get up!" he whispered; "Modred's dead!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE FACE ON THE PILLOW.

Often the first shock of some unexpected mental blow shakes from the soul, not its corresponding emotion, but that emotion's exact antithesis. Thus, when Jason spoke I laughed. I could not on the moment believe that such hideous retribution was demanded of my already writhed and repentant conscience, and it seemed to me that he must be jesting in very ugly fashion.

Perhaps he looked astonished; anyhow he said:

"You needn't make a joke of it. Are you awake? Modred's dead, I tell you."

I sprung from the bed; I clutched him and pulled him to and fro.

"Tell me you lie—you lie—you lie!" I cried.

He did not. I could see it in his face. There and then the drought of Tophet withered and constricted my life. I was branded and doomed forevermore; a thing to shudder at and avoid.

"I will dress and come!" I said, relaxing from my hold on him, and turned away and began to hurry on my clothes. I had not felt so set in quietness since the morning of two days past. I could even think calmly and balance the pros and cons of my future behavior.

Each man must be his own judge, his own plaintiff, his own defendant—an atom of self-contained equity. By his own ruling in matters of right and wrong he must abide, suffer his own punishments, enjoy his own rewards. He is a lonely organism, in whom only himself took an interest, and as such he must be content to endure with calmness the misinterpretations of aliens.

Modred had forgiven me. Whatever was the condition, whatever the deed, it was too late now to convince me that no justification existed for my rebellion against fate.

My elder, my only brother now, watched me in silence as I dressed.

"Where is he?" I said, when I had finished.

"In bed as he was left," said Jason. "I went in this morning, while you were asleep, and found him—ah, he looks horrible," he cried, and broke off with a shudder.

I did not shrink; I felt braced up to any ordeal.

They were all in the room when we entered it. My father, Dr. Crackenthorpe, Zyp—even old Peggy, who was busying herself, with the vulture relish of her kind, over the little artificial decencies of dress and posture that seem such an outrage on the solemn unresistance of the dead.

Directly we came in Zyp ran to Jason and clung to him sobbing. I noticed it with a sort of dull resignation, and that was all; for Peggy, who had drawn a sheet over the lifeless face, pulled it down that I might look.

Then, for all my stoicism, I gave a cry.

I had left my brother the night before tired, needing rest, but, save for the extra pallor of his complexion that never boasted a great deal of color, much like his usual self. Now the dead face lying back on the pillows was awful to look upon. Spots and bars of livid purple disfigured its waxen whiteness—on the cheeks, the ears, the throat, where a deep patch was. It was greatly swollen, too, and the mouth so rigidly open that it had defied all effort to bind it close. A couple of pennies, like a hideous pair of glasses, lay, one over each eye, where they could only be kept in position by means of a filament drawn tightly round the head. The hands, stiffly crossed, with the fingers crooked like talons, lay over the breast, fastened into position with a ligature.

I turned away, feeling sick and faint. I think I reeled, for presently I found that Dr. Crackenthorpe was supporting me against his arm.

"Oh, why is he like that?" I whispered.

"'Tis a common afterclap in deaths by drowning," said he, speaking in a loud, insistent voice, as if not for the first time. "A stoppage—a relapse. During the weak small hours, when the patient's strength is at its lowest,

the overwrought lungs refuse to work—collapse, and he dies of suffocation.”

He looked at my father as he spoke, but elicited no response. It was palpable that the heavy potations of the night had so deadened the latter’s faculties as to make him incapable for the moment of realizing the full enormity of the sight before him.

“Mark me,” said the doctor; “it’s a plain case, I say, nothing out of the way; no complications. The wretched boy to all intents and purposes has been drowned.”

“Who drowned him?” said my father. He spoke thickly, stupidly; but I started, with a dreadful feeling that the locked jaws must relax and denounce me before them all.

Seeing his hopeless state, the doctor took my father’s arm and led him from the room. Zyp still clung to my brother.

“Cover it up,” whispered Jason. “He isn’t a pretty sight!”

“He wasn’t a pretty boy,” muttered Peggy, reluctantly hiding the dreadful face; “To a old woman’s view it speaks of more than his deserts. Nobody’ll come to look at me, I expect.”

“You heard what the doctor said?” asked Jason, looking across at me.

“Yes.”

“Drowned—you understand? Drowned, Renny?”

“Drowned,” I repeated, mechanically.

“Come, Zyp,” he said; “this isn’t the place for you any longer.”

They passed out of the room, she still clinging to him, so that her face was hidden.

I did not measure his words at that time. I had no thought for nice discriminations of tone; what did I care for anything any longer?

Presently I heard old Peg muttering again. She thought the room was emptied of us and she softly removed the face cloth once more.

“Ay, there ye lies, Modred—safe never to spy on poor

old Rottengoose again! Ye were a bad lot, ye were; but Peg's been more'n enough for you, she has, my lad."

Suddenly she saw me out of the tail of her eye, and turned upon me, livid with fury.

"What are ye listening to, Renalt? A black curse on spies, Renalt, I say!"

Then her manner changed and she came fawning at me fulsomely.

"What a good lad to stay wi' his brother! But Peg'll do the tending, Renalt. She be a crass old body and apt to reviling in her speech, but she don't mean it, bless you; it's the tic doldrums in her head."

I repelled the horrible old creature and fled from the room. What she meant I neither knew nor cared, for we had always looked upon her as a feckless body, with a big worm in her brain.

All the long morning I wandered about the house, scarcely knowing what I did or whither I went. Once I found myself in the room of silence, not remembering when I had come there or for what reason. The fact, merely, was impressed upon me by a gradual change in the nature of my sensations. Something seemed to be asking a question of me which I was striving and striving to answer. It didn't distress me at first, for a nearer misery overwhelmed everything, but by and by its insistence pierced a passage through all dull obstacles, and the something took up its abode in me and reigned and grew. I felt myself yielding, yielding; and strove now to beat off the inevitable horror of the answer that was rising in me. I did not know what it was, or the question to which it was a response—only I saw that if I yielded to it and spoke it, I should die then and there of the black terror of its revelation.

I sprung to my feet with a cry, and saw, or thought I saw, Modred standing by the water wheel and beckoning to me. If I had strength to escape, it was enough for that and no more, for everything seemed to go from me till I found myself sitting at the foot of the stairs, with Jason looking oddly down upon me.

"I needn't get up," I said. "Modred isn't dead, after all."

I think I heard him shout out. Anyhow, I felt myself lifted up and carried somewhere and put down. If they had thought to restrain me, however, they should have managed things better; for I was up in a moment and out at the window. I had often thought one wanted only the will to forget gravity and float through the air, and here I was doing it. What a glorious sensation it was! I laughed to think how long I had remained like a reptile, bound to the plodding miserable earth, when all the time I had power to escape from myself and float on and on far away from all those heart-breaking troubles. If I only went very swiftly at first I should soon be too distant for them to track me, and then I should be free. I felt a little anxious, for there was a faint noise behind me. I strove to put on pace; if my limbs had responded to my efforts no bird could have outstripped me. But I saw with agony that the harder I fought the less way I made. I struggled and sobbed and clutched myself blindly onward, and all the time the noise behind grew deeper. If I pushed myself off with a foot to the ground I only floated a very little way now. Then I saw a railing and pulled myself along with it toilsomely, but some great pressure was in front of me and my feet slipped into holes at every step. Panting, straining, slipping, as if on blood—why! It was blood! I had to yield at last.

My passion of hope was done with. I lay in a white set horror, not daring to move or look. How deadly quiet the room was, but not for long, for a little stealthy rustle of the sheet beside me prickled through my whole being with its ghastly stirring. Then I knew it had secretly risen on its elbow and was leaning over and looking down upon me. If I could only perspire, I thought, my bonds would loosen and I could escape from it. But it was cunning and knew that, too, and it sealed all the surface of my skin with its acrid exhalations. Suddenly it clutched me in its crooked arms and bore me down, down to the room of silence. There was a sickening odor there and the covering of the wheel was open.

Then, with a shudder, as of death, I thought I found the answer; for now it was plain that the great wheel was driven by blood, not water. As I looked aghast, straining over, it gave me a stealthy push and, with a shriek, I splashed among the paddles and was whirled down. For ages I was spun and beaten round and round, mashed, mangled, gasping for breath and choked with the horrible crimson broth that fed the insane and furious grinding of the wheel. At the end, glutted with torture, it flung me forth into a parching desert of sand, and, spinning from me, became far away a revolving disk of red that made the low-down sun of that waste corner of the world.

I was alone, now—always alone. No footsteps had ever trod that trackless level, nor would, I knew, till time was ended. I had no hope; no green memory for oasis; no power of speech even. Then I knew I was dead; had been dead so long that my body had crackled and fallen to decay, leaving my soul only, like the stone of a fruit, quick with wretched impulse to shoot upward but dreadfully imprisoned from doing so.

Sometimes in the world the massive columns of the cathedral had suggested to me a like sensation; a moral impress of weight and stoniness that had driven me to bow my head and creep, sweating away from their inexorable stolidity. Now I was built into such a body—more, was an integral part of it. Yet could my pinioned nerves never assimilate its passionless obduracy, but jerked and struggled in agony to be free. Oh, how divine is the instinct that paints heaven all light and airiness, and innocent forevermore of the sense of weight!

Suddenly I heard Zyp's voice, singing outside in the world, and in a moment tears, most blessed, blessed tears, sprung from my eyes and I was free. The stone cracked and fell asunder, and I leaped out madly shrieking at my release.

She was sitting under a tree in a beautiful meadow and her young voice rose sweetly as she pinked her hat with daisies and yellow king-cups. She called me to her and gave me tender names and smoothed away the pain from

my forehead with kisses and the cunning of her elfish brown hand.

"Come, drink," she said, "and you will be better."

I woke to life and looked up. She was standing by my bed, holding a cup toward my lips, and at the foot Jason leaned, looking on.

"Have I been ill?" I said, in a voice so odd to me that I almost laughed.

"Yes, yes—a little; but you have come out of the black pit now into the forest."

CHAPTER X.

JASON SPEAKS.

For some three weeks I had lain racked and shriveled in a nervous, delirious fever. It left me at last, the ghost of my old self, to face once more the problems of a ruined life. For many days these gave me no concern, or only in a fitful, indifferent manner. I was content to sip the dew of convalescence, to slumber and to cherish my exhaustion, and the others disturbed me but little. My recovery once assured, they left me generally to myself, scarce visiting me more often than was necessary for the administering of food or medicine. Sometimes one or other of them would come and sit by my bedside awhile and exchange with me a few desultory remarks; but this was seldom, and grew, with my strength more so, for the earth was brilliant with summer outside and naturally fuller of attractions than a sick-room.

Their neglect troubled me little at first; but by and by, when the first idle ecstasy of convalescence was beginning to deepen into a sense of responsibilities that I should soon have to gather up and adjust, it woke day by day an increasing uneasiness in my soul. As yet, it is true, the immediate past I could only call up before my mental vision as a blurred picture of certain events the significance of which was suggestive only. Gradually, how-

ever, detail by detail, the whole composition of it concentrated, on the blank sheet of my mind, and stood straight before me terribly uncompromising in its sternness of outline. Had I any reason to suppose, in short, that my share in Modred's death was known to or guessed at by my father, Jason or Zyp? On that pivot turned the whole prospect of my future; for as to myself, were the secret to remain mine alone, I yet felt that I could make out life with a tolerable degree of resignation in the certain knowledge that Modred had forgiven me before he died, for a momentary mad impulse, the provocation to which had been so bitter—the reaction from which had been so immediate and so equally impulsive.

Of my father, I may say at once, I had little fear. His manner toward me when, as he did occasionally, he came and sat by me for a half-hour or so, was marked by a gentleness and affection I had never known him to exhibit before. Pathetic as it was, I could sometimes almost have wished it replaced by a sterner mood, a more dubious attitude; for my remorse at having so bereaved him became a barbed sting in presence of his new condescension to me that dated from the afternoon of my appeal to him, and was intensified by our common loss.

Of Zyp I hardly dared to think, or dared to do more than tremulously hover round the thought that Modred's death had absolved me from my promise to him to avoid her. Still the thought was there and perhaps I only played with self-deception when I affected to fly from it out of a morbid loyalty to him that was gone. I could not live with and not long for her with all the passion I was capable of.

Therefore it was that I dreaded any possible disclosure of a suspicion on her part—dreaded it with a fever of the mind so fierce that it must truly have retarded my recovery indefinitely had not a counter-irritant occurred to me, in certain moods, in the form of a thought that perhaps, after all, my deed might not so affright one who, on her own showing, found a charm in the contemplation of evil.

But it was Jason I feared most. Something—I can hardly give it a name—had come to me within the last few weeks that seemed to be the preface to an awakening of the moral right on my part. In the unfolding of this new faculty I was startled and distressed to observe deformities in my brother where I had before seen nothing but manly beauty and a breezy recklessness that I delighted in. Beautiful bodily, I and all must still think him, though it had worried me lately to often observe an expression in his blue eyes that was only new to my new sense. This I can but describe, with despair of the melodramatic sound of it, as poisonous. The pupils were as full and purple as berries of the deadly nightshade.

It was not, however, his eyes only that baffled me. I saw that he coveted any novelty of sensation greedily, and that sooner than forego enjoyment of it he would ruthlessly stamp down whatever obstacle to its attainment crossed his path.

Now I knew in my heart that his hitherto indifference to Zyp was an affectation born only of wounded vanity, and that such as he could never voluntarily yield so piquant a prize to homelier rivals. I recalled, with a brooding apprehension, certain words of his on that fatal morning, that seemed intended to convey, at least, a dark suspicion as to the manner of Modred's death. Probably they were bolts shot at random with a sinister object—for I could conceive no shadow of direct evidence against me. In that connection they might mean much or little; in one other I had small doubt that they meant a good deal—this in fact, that, if I got in his way with Zyp, down I should go.

Daily probing and analyzing such darkly dismal problems as these, I slowly crawled through convalescence to recovery.

It was a sweltering morning in early July that I first crept out of doors, with Zyp for my companion. It was happiness to me to have her by my side, though as yet my weak and watery veins could prickle to no ghost of passion. I had thought that life could hold nothing for me ever again but present pain and agonized retrospects.

It was not so. The very smell of the freshly watered roads woke a shadowy delight in me as we stepped over the threshold. The buoyant thunder of the river, as it leaped under the old street bridge seemed to gush over my heart with a cleansing joyousness that left it white and innocent again.

We crossed the road and wandered by a zig-zag path to the ancient close, where soft stretches and paddocks of green lawn, "immemorial elms" and scattered buildings antique and embowered wrought such an harmonious picture as filled my tired soul with peace.

Here we sat down on an empty bench. I had much to question Zyp about—much to reflect on and put into words—but my neglected speech moved as yet on rusty hinges.

"Zyp," I said presently, in a low voice; "tell me—where is he buried?"

"In the churchyard—St. John's, under the hill, Renny."

Not once until now had I touched upon this subject or mentioned Modred's name to any one of them, and a great longing was upon me to get it over and done with.

"Who went?"

"Dad and Jason and Dr. Crackenthorpe."

"Zyp, nobody has asked me anything about it. Don't you all want to know how—how it happened?"

"He was caught in the weeds—you said so yourself, Renny."

Vainly I strove to get under her words; intuition was, for the time being, a sluggish quantity in me.

"Yes; but——" I began, when she took me up softly.

"Dad said it was all clear and that we were never to bother you about it at all."

A sigh of gratitude to heaven escaped me.

"And I for one," said Zyp, "don't intend to."

Something in her words jarred unaccountably on my sick nerves.

"At first," she said, just glancing at me, "Dad thought there ought to be an inquest, but Dr. Crackenthorpe was so set against it that he gave in."

"Dr. Crackenthorpe? Why was——"

"He said that juries took such an idiotic view of a father's responsibilities; that dad might be censured for letting the boy run wild; that in any case the family's habits of life would be raked over and cause a scandal that might make things very uncomfortable; that it was a perfectly plain case of drowning, and that he was quite willing to give a certificate that death was due to a rupture of some blood vessel in the brain following exhaustion from exposure—or something of that sort."

"And he did?"

"Yes, at last, after a deal of talk, and he was buried quietly and there was an end of it."

Not quite an end, Zyp—not quite an end!

She was very gentle and patient with me all the morning, and my poor soul brimmed over with gratitude. My pulses began even to flicker a little with hope that things might be as they were before the catastrophe. After all she was a very independent changeling and, if there existed in her heart any bias in my favor, Jason might find himself quite baffled in his efforts to control her inclinations.

Presently I turned to the same overclouding subject.

"What happened the day I was taken bad, Zyp?"

"Jason found you on the stairs, talking rubbish. They carried you to bed and you hardly left off talking rubbish for weeks. Don't you remember anything of it?"

"Nothing, after—after I saw him lying there so dreadful."

"Ah, it was ugly, wasn't it? Well, you must have wandered off somewhere—anywhere; and the rest of us to the parlor. There dad and the doctor fell to words. They had spent all the night over that stupid drink, sleeping and quarreling by fits and couldn't remember much about it. They had not heard any noise upstairs, either of them; but suddenly the doctor pointed to something hanging out of dad's pocket. 'Why, you must have gone to the boy's room some time,' he said. 'Look there!' Dad took it out and it was Modred's braces, all twisted up and stuffed into his pocket."

"Modred's braces?"

"Yes; they all knew them, for they were blue, you know—the color he liked. Dad afterward thought he must have put them there to be out of the way while he was carrying Modred upstairs, but at the time he was furious. 'D'ye dare to imply I had a hand in my son's death?' he shrieked. 'I imply nothing; I mean no offense; they are plain for every one to see,' said the doctor, going back a little. I thought he was frightened and that dad would jump at his throat like a weasel, and I clapped my hands, waiting for the battle. But it never came, for dad turned pale and called for brandy, and there was an end of it."

This story of the doctor's horrible suggestion wrought only one comfort in me—it warmed my heart with a great heat of loyalty to one who, I knew, for all his faults, could never be guilty of so inhuman a wickedness.

"I should like to kill that doctor," I said, fiercely and proudly.

"So should I," said Zyp. "I believe he would bleed soot like a chimney."

Zyp was my companion during the greater part of that day and the next. Her manner toward me was uniformly gentle and attentive. Sometimes during meals I would become conscious of Jason's eyes fixed upon one or other of us in a curious stare that was watchful and introspective at once, as if he were summing up the voiceless arguments of counsels invisible, while never losing sight of the fact that we he sat in judgment on were already convicted in his mind. This, for the time being, did not much disturb me. I was lulled to a sense of false security by the gracious championship I thought I now could rely upon.

It was the evening of the second day and we three were in the living-room together; Jason reading at the window. Zyp had been so kind to me that my heart was very full indeed, and now she sat by me, one hand slipped into mine, the other supporting her little pointed chin, while her sweet, flower-stained eyes communed with other, it seemed than affairs of earth. A strange wistful tenderness

had marked her late treatment of me; a pathetic solicitude that was inexpressibly touching to one so forlorn. Suddenly she rose and I heard Jason's book rustle in his hand.

"Now, little boy," she said, "'tis time you were in bed."

Then she leaned toward me and whispered:

"Is he so unhappy? What has he done for Zyp's sake?"

In a moment she bent and kissed me, with a soft kiss, on the forehead, and shooting a Parthian glance of defiance at Jason, who never spoke or moved, ran from the room.

All my soul thrilled with a delicious joy. Zyp, who had refused to kiss him, had kissed me. The ecstasy of her lips' touch blotted out all significance her words might carry.

Half-stunned with triumphant happiness, I climbed the stairs and, getting into bed, fell into a luminous dream of thought in which for the moment was no place for apprehension.

I did not even hear Jason enter or shut the door, and it was only when he shook me roughly by the shoulder that I became conscious of his presence in the room.

He was standing over me, and the windows of his soul were down, and through them wickedness grinned like a skull.

"I've had enough of this," he said in a terrible low voice. "D' you want to drive me to telling that I know it was you who killed Modred?"

CHAPTER XI.

CONVICT, BUT NOT SENTENCED.

So the blow had fallen!

Yet a single despairing effort I made to beat off or at least postpone the inevitable.

I sat up in bed and answered my brother back with, I could feel, ashen and quivering lips.

"What do you mean?" I said. "How dare you say such a thing?"

"I dare anything," he said, "where I have a particular object in view." He never took his eyes off me, and the cold devil in them froze my blood that had only now run so hotly.

"For yourself," he went on, "I don't care much whether you hang or live. You can come to terms with your own conscience I dare say, and a fat brother more or less may be a pure question of fit survival. That's as it may be—but the girl here is another matter."

"I didn't kill him," I could only say, dully.

Still keeping his eyes on me he sought for and drew from his jacket pocket a twist of dry and shrunken water weed. A horrible shudder seized me as I looked upon it.

"You didn't think to see that again?" he said. "Do you recognize it? Of course you do. It was the rope you twisted round his foot, and that I found round his foot still, after dad had carried him upstairs, bundled round with those sacks, and I was left alone in the room with him a minute."

My heart died within me. I dropped my sick, strained eyes and could only listen in agonized silence. And he went on quite pitilessly.

"You shouldn't have left such evidence, you know—least of all for me to see. I had not forgotten the murder in your eyes when I spoke to you that morning and the evening before."

He struck the weed lightly with his right hand.

"This stuff," he said, "I know it, of course—grows up straight enough of itself. It wanted something human—or inhuman—to twist it round a leg in that fashion."

I broke out with a choking cry.

"I did it," I said; "but it wasn't murder—oh, Jason, it wasn't murder, as you mean it."

He gave a little cold laugh.

"No doubt we have different standards of morality," he said. "We won't split hairs. Say it was murder as a judge and jury would view it."

"It wasn't! Will you believe me if I tell you the truth?"

"That depends upon the form it takes."

"I'll tell you. It is the truth—before God, it is the truth! I won't favor myself. I had been mad with him, I own, but had nearly got over it. I was out all day on the hills and thought I should like a bathe on my way home. I went through the 'run' and saw he was there. At first I thought I would leave him to himself, but just as I was going he saw me and a grin came over his face and—Jason, you know that if I had gone away then, he would have thought me afraid to meet him."

"You can leave me, Renalt, out of the question, if you please."

"I meant no harm—indeed I didn't—but when I got there he taunted and mocked at me. I didn't know what I was doing; and when he jumped for the water I followed him and twisted that round. Then in a single moment I saw what I had done—and was mad to unfasten it. It would not come away at first, and when at last I got him free and to the shore he was insensible. If you could only know what I suffered then, you would pity me, Jason—you would; you could not help it."

I stole a despairing look at his face and there was no atom of softness in it.

"He came to on the way home and I was wild with joy, and at night, Jason, when you were in bed and asleep, I crept into his room and begged for his forgiveness and he forgave me."

"Without any condition? That wasn't like Modred. What did he ask for in return?"

I was silent.

"Come," he persisted, "what did he want? You may as well tell me all. You don't fancy that I believe he forgave you without getting something substantial in exchange?"

"I was to give up all claim to Zyp," I said in a low, suffering voice.

Jason laughed aloud.

"Oh, Modred," he cried, "you were a pretty bantling,

upon my word! Who would have thought the dear fatty had such cunning in him?"

His callous merriment struck me with a dumb horror as of sacrilege. But he subdued it directly and returned to me and my misery in the same repressed tone as before.

"Well," he said, "I have heard it all, I suppose. It makes little difference. You know, of course, you are morally responsible for his death, just the same as if you had stuck a knife into his heart."

I could only hide my face in the bedclothes, writhed all through with agony. There was a little spell of silence; then my brother bespoke my attention with a gentle push.

"Renny, do you want all this known to the others?"

I raised my head in a sudden gust of passion.

"Do what you like!" I cried. "I know you now, and you can't make it much worse!"

"Oh, yes," he said, coolly; "I can make it a good deal worse. Nobody but I knows at present, don't you see?"

I looked at him with a sudden gleam of hope.

"Don't you intend to tell, Jason?"

He laughed again, lightly.

"That depends. I must borrow my cue from Modred and make conditions."

I had no need to ask what they were. In whatever direction I looked now, I saw nothing but a blank and deadly waste.

"I want the girl—you understand? I need not go into particulars. She interests me and that's enough."

"Yes," I said, quietly.

"There must be no more of that sentimental foolery between you and her. I bore it as long as you were ill; but, now you're strong again, it must stop. If it doesn't, you know what'll happen."

With that he turned abruptly on his heel and began to undress. I listened for the deep breathing that announced him to be asleep with a strained fever of impatience. I felt that I could not think cleanly or collect-

edly with that monstrous consciousness of his awake in the room.

Perhaps, in all my wretchedness, the full discovery of his baseness of soul was as bitter a wound as any I had received. I had so looked up to him as a superior being, so sunned myself in the pride of relationship to him; so lovingly submitted to his boyish patronage and condescension. The grief of my discovery was very real and terrible and would in itself, I think, have gone far to blight my existence had no fearfuller blast descended to wither it.

Well, it was all one now. Whatever immunity from disaster I was to enjoy henceforth must be on sufferance only.

Had I been older and sinfuller I might have grasped in my despair at the coward's resource of self-destruction; as it was, I thought of flight. By and by, perhaps, when vigor should return to me, and with it resolution, I should be able to face firmly the problem of my future and take my own destinies in hand.

Little sleep came to me that night, and that only of a haunted kind. I felt haggard and old as I struggled into my clothes the next morning, and all unfit to cope with the gigantic possibilities of the day. Jason had gone early to the fatal pool for a bathe.

At breakfast, in the beginning, Zyp's manner to me was prettily sympathetic and a little shy. It was the first of my great misery that I must repel her on the threshold of our better understanding, and see her fall away from me for lack of the least expression of that passionate devotion and gratitude that filled my heart to bursting. I could see at once that she was startled—hurt, perhaps, and that she shrunk from me immediately. Jason talked airily to my father all through the meal, but I knew his senses to be as keenly on the alert as if he had sat in silence, with his eyes fixed upon my face.

I choked over my bread and bacon; I could not swallow more than a mouthful of the coffee in my cup, and Zyp sat back in her chair, never addressing me after that

first rebuff, but pondering on me angrily with her eyes full of a sort of wonder.

She stopped me peremptorily as, breakfast over, I was hastening out with all the speed I could muster, and asked me if I didn't want her company that morning.

"No," I answered; "I am well enough to get about by myself now."

"Very well," she said. "Then you must do without me altogether for the future."

She turned on her heel and I could only look after her in dumb agony. Then I crept down into the yard and confided my grief to the old cart wheels.

Presently, raising my head, I saw her standing before me, her hands under her apron, her face grave with an expression, half of concern, half of defiance.

"Now, if you please," she said, "I want to know the meaning of this?"

"Of what?" I asked, with wretched evasiveness.

"You know—your manner toward me this morning."

"I have done nothing," I muttered.

"You have insulted me, sir. Is it because I kissed you last night?"

"Oh, Zyp!" I cried aloud in great pain. "You know it isn't—you know it isn't!"

I couldn't help this one cry. It was forced from me.

"Then what's the reason?"

"I can't give it—I have none. I want to be alone, that's all."

She stood looking at me a moment in silence, and the line of her mouth hardened.

"Very well," she said, at last. "Then, understand, I've done with you. I thought at first it was a mistake or that you were ill again. I've been kind to you; you can't say I haven't given you a chance. And I pitied you because you were alone and unhappy. Jason, I will tell you, hinted an evil thing of you to me, but even if it was true, which I didn't believe, I forgave you, thinking, perhaps, it was done for my sake. Well, if it was, I tell you now it was useless, for you will be nothing to me ever again."

And, with these cruel words, she left me. The proud

child of the woods could brook no insult to her condescension, and from my comrade she had become my enemy.

I suppose I should have been relieved that the inevitable rupture had occurred so swiftly and effectually. Judge you, you poor outcasts who, sanctifying a love in your tumultuous breasts, have had to step aside and yield to another the fruit you so coveted.

Once pledged to antagonism, Zyp, it will be no matter for wonder, adopted anything but half-measures. Had it only been her vanity that was hurt she would have made me pay dearly for the blow. As it was, her ingenuity in devising plans for my torture and discomfort verged upon the very bounds of reason.

At first she contented herself with mere verbal pleasantries and disdainful snubbings. As, however, the days went on and my old strength and health obstinately returned to me, despite the irony of the shattered soul within, her animosity grew to be an active agent so persistent in its methods that I verily thought my brain would give way under the load.

I cannot, indeed, recall a tithe of the Pucklike devices she resorted to for my moral undoing, and which, after all, I might have endured to the end had it not been for one threading torment that accompanied all her whimsies like a strain of diabolical music. This was an ostentatious show of affection for Jason, which, I truly believe, from being more or less put on in exaggerated style for my edification, became at length such a habit with her as may be considered, in certain dispositions, one form of love.

The two now were seldom apart. Once, conscious of my presence, she kissed Jason on the lips, because he had brought her a little flowering root of some plant she desired. I saw his face fire up darkly and he looked across at me with a triumph that made me almost hate him.

And the worst of it was that I knew that my punishment was not more than commensurate with the offense; that my sin had been grievous and its retribution not out

of proportion. How could full atonement and Zyp have been mine together?

Still, capable of acknowledging the fitness of things in my sadder hours of loneliness, my nature, once restored to strength, could not but strive occasionally to throw off the incubus that it felt it could not bear much longer without breaking down for good and all. I had done wrong on the spur of a single wicked impulse, but I was no fiend to have earned such bitter reprisal. By slow degrees rebellion woke in my heart against the persistent cruelty of my two torturers. Had I fled at this juncture, the wild scene that took place might have been averted, and the exile, which became mine nevertheless, have borne, perhaps, less evil fruit than in the result it did.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DENUNCIATION.

One November morning—my suffering had endured all these months—my father and Dr. Crackenthorpe stood before the sitting-room fire, talking, while I sat with a book at the table, vainly trying to concentrate my attention on the printed lines.

Since my recovery I had seen the doctor frequently, but he had taken little apparent notice of me. Now, I had racked my puzzled mind many a time for recollection of the conversation I had been witness of on the night preceding my seizure, but still the details of it had eluded me, though its gist remained in a certain impression of uneasiness that troubled me when I thought of it. Suddenly, on this morning, a few words of the doctor's brought the whole matter vividly before me again.

"By the bye, Trender," he said, drawlingly, and sat down and began to poke the fire—"by the bye, have you ever found that thing you accused me of losing for you on a certain night—you know when?"

"No," said my father, curtly.

"Was it of any value, now?"

"Maybe—maybe not," said my father.

"That don't seem much of answer. Perhaps, now, it came from the same place those others did."

"That's nothing to you, Dr. Crackenthorpe."

"Well, you say it's lost, anyhow. Supposing I found it, would you agree to my keeping it? Treasure-trove, you know"—and he looked up with a grin, balancing the poker perpendicularly in his hand. "Treasure-trove, my friend," he repeated, with emphasis, and gave the other a keen look.

Something in the tone of his speech woke light in my brain, and I remembered at a flash. I stole an anxious glance at my father. His face was pale and set with anger, but there was an expression in his eyes that looked like fear.

"You don't mean to tell me you have found it?" he said in a forced voice.

"Oh, by no means," answered the doctor. "We haven't all your good luck. Only you are so full of the unexpected in producing valuables from secret places, like a conjurer, that I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind my keeping this particular one if I should chance to pick it up."

"Keep it, certainly, if you can find it," said my father, I could have thought almost with a faint groan.

"Thanks for the permission, my friend; I'll make a point of keeping my eyes open."

When did he not? They were pretty observant now on Zyp and Jason, who, as he spoke, walked into the room.

"Hullo!" said my brother. "Good-morning to you, doctor, and a sixpence to toss for your next threppenny fee."

"Hold your tongue," cried my father, angrily.

"I would give a guinea to get half for attending on your inquest," said the doctor, sourly. "Keep your wit for your wench, my good lad, and see then that she don't go begging."

"I could give you better," muttered Jason, cowed by

my father's presence, "but it shall keep and mature." Then he turned boisterously on me.

"Why don't you go out, Renny, instead of moping at home all day?"

His manner was aggressive, his tone calculated to exasperate.

Moved by discretion I rose from my chair and made for the door; but he barred my way.

"Can't you answer me?" he said, with an ugly scowl.

"No—I don't want to. Let me pass."

My father had turned his back upon us and was staring gloomily down at the fire.

I heard Zyp give a little scornful laugh and she breathed the word "coward" at me.

I stopped as if I had struck against a wall. All my blood surged back on my heart and seemed to leave my veins filled with a tingling ichor in its place.

"Perhaps I have been," I said, in a low voice, "but here's an end of it."

Jason tittered.

"We're mighty stiltish this morning," he said, with a sneer. "What a pity it's November, so that we can't have a plunge for the sake of coolness—except that they say the pool's haunted now."

I looked at him with blazing eyes, then made another effort to get past him, but he repelled me violently.

"You don't know your place," he said, and gave an insolent laugh. "Stand back till I choose to let you go."

I heard the doctor snigger and Zyp gave a second little cluck. My father was still absorbed—lost in his own dark reflections.

The loaded reel of endurance was spinning to its end.

"You might have given all your morning to one of your Susans yonder," said my brother, mockingly. "Now she's gone, I expect, with her apron to her eyes. She'll enjoy her pease pudding none the less, I dare say, and perhaps look out for a more accommodating clown. It won't be the first time you've had to take second place."

I struck him full between the eyes and he went down like a polled ox. All the pent-up agony of months was

in my blow. As I stepped back in the recoil, madly straining even then to beat under the more furious devil that yelled in me for release, I was conscious of a hurried breath at my ear—a swift whisper: "Kill him! Stamp on his mouth! Don't let him get up again!" and knew that it was Zyp who spoke.

I put her back fiercely. Jason had sprung to his feet—half-blinded, half-stunned. His face was inhuman with passion and was working like a madman's. But before he could gather himself for a rush, my father had him in his powerful arms. It all happened in a moment.

"What's all this?" roared my father. "Knock under, you whelp, or I'll strangle you in your collar!"

"Let me go!" cried my brother. "Look at him—look what he did!"

He was choking and struggling to that degree that he could hardly articulate. I think foam was on his lips, and in his eyes the ravenous thirst for blood.

"He struck me!" he panted—"do you hear? Let me go—let me kill him as he killed Modred!"

There was a moment's silence. Dr. Crackenthorpe, who had sat passively back in his chair during the fray, with his lips set in an acrid smile, made as if to rise, leaning forward with quick attention. Then my father shook Jason till he reeled and clutched at him.

"Have a mind what you say, you mad cur!" he cried in a terrible voice.

"It's true! Let me go! He confessed it all to me—to me, I say!"

I stood up among them alone, stricken, and I was not afraid. I was a better man than my accuser; a better brother, despite my sin. And his dagger, plunged in to destroy, had only released the long-accumulating agony of my poor inflamed and swollen heart.

"Father," I said, "let him alone. It is true, what he says."

He flung Jason from him with violence.

"Move a step," he thundered, daring him, "and I'll send you after Modred!"

He came to me and took me gently by the shoulder.

"Renalt, my lad," he said, "I am waiting to hear."

I did not falter, or condone my offense, or make any appeal to them whatsoever. The kind touch on my arm moved me so that I could have broken into tears. But my task was before me and I could afford no atom of self-indulgence, did I wish to get through it bravely.

As I had told my story to Jason, I told it now; and when I had finished I waited, in a dead silence, the verdict. I could hear my brother breathing thickly—expectantly. His fury had passed in the triumph of his own abasement.

Suddenly my father put the hand he had held on my shoulder before his face and a great sob coming from him broke down the stone walls of my pride.

"Dad—dad!" I cried in agony.

He recovered himself in a moment and moved away; then faced round and addressed me, but his eyes looked down and would not meet mine.

"Before God," he said, "I think you are forgiven for a single impulse we all might suffer and not all of us recoil from the instant after, but I think that this can be no place for you any longer."

Then he turned upon Dr. Crackenthorpe.

"You!" he cried; "you, man, who have heard it all, thanks to that dirty reptile yonder! Do you intend to peach?"

The doctor pinched his wiry chin between finger and thumb, with his cheeks lifted in a contemplative fashion.

"The boy," he said, "is safe from any one's malice. No jury would convict on such evidence. Still, I agree with you, it's best for him to go."

"You hear, Renalt?" said my father. "I'll not drive you in any way, or deny you harbor here if you think you can face it out. You shall judge for yourself."

"I have judged," I answered; "I will go."

I walked past them all, with head erect, and up to my room, where I sat down for a brief space to collect my thoughts and face the future. Hardly had I got hold of the first end of the tangle when there came a knock at the door. I opened it and Zyp was outside.

"You fool!" she whispered; "you should have done as I told you. It's too late now. Here, take this. Dad told me to give it you"—and she thrust a canvas bag of money into my hand, looking up at me with her unfathomable eyes.

As I took it, suddenly she flung her arms about my neck and kissed me passionately, once, twice, thrice, on the lips, and so pushed me from her and was gone. And as I stood there came to my ears a faint wail from above, and I said to myself doggedly: "It is a gull flying over the house."

Taking nothing with me but cap, stick and the simple suit of clothes I had on, I descended the stairs with a firm tread and passed the open door of the sitting-room. There was silence there, and in silence I walked by it without a glance in its direction. It held but bitter memories for me now and was scarce less haunted in its way than the other. And so to me would it always be—haunted by the beautiful wild memory of a changeling, whose coming had wrought the great evil of my life, to whom I, going, attributed no blame, but loved her then as I had loved her from the first.

The booming of the wheel shook, like a voice of mockery, at me as I passed the room of silence. Its paddles, I thought, seemed reeling with wicked merriment, and its creaking thunder to spin monotonously the burden of one chant.

"I let you go, but not to escape—I let you go, but not to escape." The fancy haunted my mind for weeks to come.

In the darkness of the passage a hand seized mine and wrung it fiercely.

"You don't mean to let the grass grow on your resolve, then, Renalt?" said my father's voice, rough and subdued.

"No, dad; I can do no good by delaying."

"I'm sore to let you go, my boy. But it's for the best—it's for the best. Don't think hardly of me; and be a fine lad and strike out a path for yourself."

"God bless you, dad," I said, and so left him.

As I stepped into the frosty air the cathedral bells rung out like iron on an anvil. The city roofs and towers sparkled with white; the sun looked through a shining mist, giving earnest of gracious hours to come.

It was a happy omen.

I turned my back on the old decaying past and set my face toward London.

CHAPTER XIII.

MY FRIEND THE CRIPPLE.

In the year 1860, of which I now write, so much of prejudice against railways still existed among many people of a pious or superstitious turn of mind, that I can quote much immediate precedent in support of my resolve to walk to London rather than further tempt a Providence I had already put to so severe a strain. It must be borne in mind of course that we Trenderers were little more than barbarians of an unusual order, who had been nourished on a scorn of progress and redeemed only by a natural leaning toward picturesqueness of a pagan kind. Moreover, the sense of mystery, which was an integral part of our daily experience, had ingrained in us all a general antagonism toward unconstructed agencies. Lastly, not one of us had ever as yet been in a train.

Still, it was with no feeling of inability to carve a road for myself through the barriers to existence that I drew, on the evening of my third day's tramp, toward the overlapping pall that was the roof of the "City of Dreadful Night."

I had slept, on my road, respectively at Farnham and Guildford, where, in either case, cheap accommodation was easily procurable, and foresaw a difficulty, only greater in proportion, in finding reasonable lodging in London during the time I was seeking work. Indifferently I pictured this city to myself as only an elongated

High street, with ramifications more numerous and extended than those of the old burgh that was my native town. I was startled, overwhelmed, dazed with the black, aimless scurrying of those interwoven strings of human ants, that ran by their thronging brick heaps, eager in search for what they never seemed to find, or shot and vanished into tunnels and alleys of darkness, or were attracted to and scorched up by, apparently, the broad sheets of flame that were the shop windows of their Vanity Fair. Moving amid the swarm from vision to vision—always an inconsiderable atom there without meaning or individuality—always stunned and stupefied by the threatening masses of masonry that hemmed me in, and accompanied me, and broke upon me in new dark forms through every vista and gap that the rank growth of ages had failed to block—the inevitable sense grew upon me, as it grows upon all who pace its interminable streets friendless, of walking in a world to which I was by heavenly birthright an alien.

Near midnight, I turned into a gaunt and lonely square, where comparative quiet reigned.

I had entered London by way of Waterloo bridge, as the wintry dusk was falling over house and river, and all these hours since had I been pacing its crashing thoroughfares, alive only to wonder and the cruel sense of personal insignificance. As to a lodging and bed for my weary limbs—sooner had Childe Roland dared the dark tower than I the burrows, that night, of the unknown pandemonium around me. I had slept in the open of the fields before now. Here, though winter, it hardly seemed that there was an out-of-doors, but that the buildings were only so many sleeping closets in a dark hall.

All round the square inside was a great inclosure encompassed by a frouzy hoarding of wood, and set in the middle of the inclosure was some dim object that looked like a ruined statue. Such by day, indeed, I found it to be, and of no less a person than his late majesty, King George the First. When my waking eyes first lighted on him, I saw him to be half-sunk into his horse, as if

seeking to shield himself therein from the shafts of his persecutors, who, nothing discomposed, had daubed what remained of the crippled charger himself with blotches of red and white paint.

I walked once or twice round the square, seeking vainly, at first, to still the tumult of my brain. The oppressive night of locked-up London, laden like a thunder cloud with store of slumbering passions, was lowering now and settling down like a fog. The theaters were closed; the streets echoing to the last foot-falls. Seeing a hole in the hoarding, I squeezed through it and withdrew into the rank grass and weeds that choked the interior of the inclosure. I had bought and brought some food with me, and this I fell to munching as I sat on a hummock of rubbish, and was presently much comforted thereby, so that nothing but sleep seemed desirable to me in all the world. Therefore I lay down where I was and buttoning my coat about me, was, despite the frosty air, soon lost in delicious forgetfulness. At first my slumber was broken by reason of the fitful rumble of wheels, or pierced by voices and dim cries that yet resounded phantomly here and there, as if I lay in some stricken city, where only the dying yet lived and wailed, but gradually these all passed from me.

I awoke with the gray of dawn on my face and sat up. My limbs were cramped and stiff with the cold, and a light rime lay upon my clothes. Otherwise no bitterer result had followed my rather untoward experiment.

Then I looked about me and saw for the first time that I was not alone. Certain haggard and unclean creatures were my bed-fellows in that desolate oasis. They lay huddled here and there, like mere scarecrows blown over by the wind and lying where they fell. There were women among them, and more than one pinched and tattered urchin, with drawn, white face resolved by sleep into nothing but pathos and starvation.

There they lay at intervals, as if on a battlefield where the crows had been busy, and each one seemed to lie flattened into the earth as dead bodies lie.

I could not but be thankful that I had stumbled over

no one of them when I had entered—an accident which would very possibly have lost me my little store of money, if it had, indeed, led to nothing worse. As it was, I prepared for a hasty exit, and was about to rise, when I became conscious that my movements were under observation by one who lay not twenty feet from me.

He was so hidden by the rank grass that at first I could make out nothing but a long, large-boned face peering at me above the stems through eyes as black and glinting as boot buttons. A thatch of dark hair fell about his ears and forehead, and his eyebrows, also black, were sleek and pointed like ermine tips.

The face was so full and fine that I was startled when its owner rose, which he did on the instant, to see that he was a thick-set and stunted cripple. He shambled toward me with a winning smile on his lips, and before I could summon resolution to retreat, had come and sat down beside me.

"We seem the cocks of this company," he said, in a deep musical voice. "Among the blind the one-eyed—eh?"

He was warmly and decently clad, and I could only wonder at his choice of bedroom. He read me in a look.

"I've a craving for experiences," he said. "These aren't my usual quarters."

"No," I said; "I suppose not."

"Nor yours?" he went on, with a keen glance at me.

To give my confidence to a stranger was an unwise proceeding, but I was guileless as to the craft of great cities, and in this case my innocence was in a manner my good fortune.

I told him that I was only yesterday from the country, after a three days' tramp, and how I was benighted.

"Ah," he said. "Up after work, I suppose?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Well," said he, "let's understand your capacities. Guess my age first."

"Forty," said I, at a venture, for indeed he might have been that or anything else.

"I'm 21," he said. "Don't I look it? We mature early

in London here. What do you think's my business?"

"Oh, you're a gentleman, aren't you?" I asked, with some stir of shyness.

"I'm a printer's hand. That means something very different to you, don't it? Maybe you'll develop in time. Where are you from?"

I told him.

"Ah," he said. "You've a proverb down your way: 'Manners makeyth man.' So they may, as they construe it—a fork for the fingers and a pretty trick of speech; but it's the manners of the soul make the gentleman. Do you believe in after-life?"

"Of course I do. Where do the ghosts come from otherwise?"

He laughed pleasantly, rubbing his chin in a perplexed manner, and then I noticed that his fingers were stunted like a mechanic's and stained with printer's ink.

"Old Ripley would fancy you," he said.

"Who's he?"

"My governor—printer, binder and pamphleteer, an opponent of all governments but his own. He's an anarchist, who'd like to transfer himself and his personal belongings to some desert satellite, after laying a train to blow up the earth with nitro-glycerin and then he'd want to overturn the heavenly system."

"He doesn't sound hopeful."

"No, he isn't, but he's fairly original for a fanatic. I wonder if he'd give you work?"

"Oh, thanks!" I exclaimed.

"Nonsense; you needn't mind him. He's only gas. Unmixed with his native air he wouldn't be explosive, you know. I can imagine him a very unprogressive angel. It's notoriety he wants. Nothing satisfies his sort in the end like a scaffold outside of Newgate with 40,000 eyes looking on and 12 guineas paid for a window in the 'Magpie and Stump.'"

"Are you——" I began, when he took me up with:

"His kind? Not a bit of it. I'm an idealist—a dreamer asking the way to Utopia. I look about for the

finger-posts in places like this. One must learn and suffer to dream properly."

"You can do that and yet have ugly enough dreams," I said, with subdued emphasis.

"That oughtn't to be so," he said, looking curiously at me. "Nightmare comes from self-indulgence. Cosset your grievances and they'll control you. You must be an ascetic in the art of sensation."

"And starve on a pillar like that old saint Mr. Tennyson wrote of," I answered.

"Go and hang yourself," he cried, pushing at me with a laugh. "Hullo! Who's here?"

A couple of the scarecrows, evil-looking men both, had risen, and stood over us to one side, listening.

"Toff kenners," I heard one of them mutter, "and good for jink, by the looks."

"Tap the cady," the other murmured, and both creatures shuffled round to the front of us.

"Good for a midjick, matey?" asked the more ruffianly looking of the two in a menacing tone.

I started, bewildered by their jargon. My companion looked up at them smiling and drumming out a tune on his knee.

"Stow it," said the smaller man to the other; "I've tried the griffin and it don't take." Then he bent his body and whined in a fulsome voice: "Overtaken with a drop, good gentlemen? And won't you pay a trifle for your lodgings, now?"

I was about to rise, but a gesture on the part of both fellows showed me that they intended to keep us at our disadvantage. A blowzed and noisome woman was advancing to join the group.

"Be alert," whispered my companion. "We must get out of this."

The words were for me, but the men gathered their import and assumed a threatening manner. No doubt, seeing but a boy and a cripple, they valued us beneath our muscular worth.

"Come," said the big man, "we don't stand on ceremony; we want the price of a drink."

He advanced upon us, as he spoke, with an ugly look and in a moment my companion had seized him by the ankles and whirled him over against his friend, so that the two crashed down together. The woman set up a screech, as we jumped to our feet, and we saw wild heads start up here and there like snakes from the grass. But before any one could follow us we had gained the rent in the hoarding and slipped through. Glancing back, after I had made my exit, I saw one of the men strike the woman full in the face and fell her to the ground. It was his gentle corrective to her for not having stopped us, and the sight made my blood so boil that I was on the point of tearing back, had not my companion seized and fairly carried me off. As in many cripples, his strength of arm was prodigious.

"Now," he said, when he had quieted me, "we'll go home to breakfast."

"Where?" said I.

"Home, my friend. Oh, I have one, you know, for all my sleeping out there. That was a test for experience; my first one of the kind, but valuable in its way."

"But——" I began.

"Yes, you will," he cried. "You'll be my guest. I've taken a bit of a fancy to you. What's your name?"

When I had told him, "Duke Straw's mine," he said; "though I'm not of strawberry-leaf descent. But it's a good name for a dreamer, isn't it? Have you ever read 'Feathertop,' by Hawthorne?"

"No," I said.

"Never mind, then. When you do, you'll recognize my portrait—a poor creature of straw that moves by smoke."

"What smoke?" I asked, bewildered.

"Perhaps you'll find out some day—if Ripley takes a fancy to you."

"You don't want me to go to him?"

"Certainly I do. I'm going to take you with me when I tramp to work at 9 o'clock."

He was so cool and masterful that I could only laugh and walk on with him.

CHAPTER XIV.

I OBTAIN EMPLOYMENT.

It was broad day when we emerged from the inclosure, and sound was awakening along the wintry streets. London stood before me rosy and refreshed, so that she looked no longer formidably unapproachable as she had in her garb of black and many jewels. I might have entered her yesterday with the proverbial half-crown, so easily was my lot to fall in accommodating places.

Duke Straw, whom I was henceforth to call my friend, conducted me by a township of intricate streets to the shop of a law stationer, in a petty way of business, which stood close by Clare market and abutted on Lincoln's Inn Fields. Here he had a little bedroom, furnished with a cheap oil-cooking stove, whereon he heated his coffee and grilled his bacon.

Simon Cringle, the proprietor of the shop, was taking his shutters down as we walked up. He was a little, spare man, with a vanity of insignificance. His iron-gray hair fell in short, well-greased ringlets and his thin beard in a couple more, that hung loose like dangled wood shavings; his coiled mustaches reminded one of watch springs; his very eyebrows, like bees' legs, were humped in the middle and twisted up into fine claws at the tips. Duke, in his search for lodging and experience, had no sooner seen this curiosity than he closed with him.

He gave my companion a grandiloquent "Good-morning."

"Up with the lark, Mr. Straw," said he, "and I hope, sir, with success in the matter of getting the first worm?" Here he looked hard at me.

"He found me too much of a mouthful," said I; "so he brought me home for breakfast."

Duke laughed.

"Come and be grilled," said he. "Anyhow they roast malt-worms in a place spoken of by Falstaff."

We had a good, merry meal. I should not have thought it possible my heart could have lightened so. But there was a fascinating individuality about my companion that, I am afraid, I have but poorly suggested. He gave me glimmerings of life in a higher plane than that which had been habitual to me. No doubt his code of morals was eccentric and here and there faulty. His manner of looking at things was, however, so healthy, his breezy philosophy so infectious, that I could not help but catch some of his complaint—which was, like that of the nightingale, musical.

Perhaps, had I met him by chance six months ago, my undeveloped soul would have resented his easy familiarity with a cubbish snarl or two. Now my receptives were awakened; my armor of self-sufficiency eaten to rags with rust; my heart plaintive for communion with some larger influence that would recognize and not abhor.

At 8:45 he haled me off to the office, which stood a brief distance away, in a thoroughfare called Great Queen street. Here he left me awhile, bidding me walk up and down and observe life until his chief should arrive, which he was due to do at the half-hour.

I thought it a dull street after some I had seen, but there were many old book and curiosity shops in it that aroused my interest. While I was looking into one of them I heard Duke call.

"Here," he said, when I reached him; "answer out and I think Ripley will give you work. I'm rather a favorite with him—that's the truth."

He led me into a low-browed room, with a counter. Great bales of print and paper went up to the ceiling at the back, and the floor rumbled with the clank of subterranean machinery. One or two clerks were about and wedged into a corner of the room was a sort of glazed and wooden crate of comfortable proportions,

which was, in fact, the chapel of ease of the minister of the place.

Into this den Duke conducted me with ceremony, and, retreating himself, left me almost tumbling over a bald-headed man, with a matted black beard, on which a protruding red upperlip lay like a splash of blood, who sat at a desk writing.

"Shut the door," he said, without looking up.

"It is shut, sir."

He trailed a glance at me, as if in scrutiny, but I soon saw he could only have been balancing some phrase, for he dived again and went on writing.

Presently he said, very politely, indeed, and still intent on his paper: "Are you a cadet of the noble family of Kinsale, sir?"

"No, sir," I answered, in surprise.

"You haven't the right to remain covered in the presence of the king?"

"No, sir."

"Well, I'm king here. What the blazes do you mean by standing in a private room with your hat on?"

I plucked it off, tingling.

"I'm sorry," I said. "Mr. Straw brought me in so suddenly, I lost my head and my cap went with it, I suppose. But I see it's not the only thing one may lose here, including tempers!" And with that I turned on my heel and was about to beat a retreat, fuming.

"Come back!" shouted Mr. Ripley. "If you go now, you go for good!"

I hesitated; the memory of my late comrade restored my equilibrium.

"I didn't mean to be rude, sir," I said. "I shall be grateful to you if you will give me work."

He had condescended to turn now, and was looking full at me with frowning eyes, but with no sign of anger on his face.

"Well, you can speak out," he said. "How do you come to know Straw?"

"I met him by chance and we got talking together."

"How long have you been in London?"

"Since yesterday evening."

"Why did you leave Winton?"

"To get work."

"Have you brought a character with you?"

Here was a question to ask a Trender! But I answered, "No, I never thought of it," with perfect truth.

"What can you do?"

"Anything I'm told, sir."

"That's a compromising statement, my friend. Can you read and write?"

"Yes, of course."

"Anything else?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? Don't you know anything now about the habits of birds and beasts and fishes?"

"Oh, yes! I could tell you a heap about that."

"Could you? Very well; I'll give you a trial. I take you on Straw's recommendation. His opinion, I tell you, I value more than a score of written characters in a case like this. You've to make yourself useful in fifty different ways."

I assented, with a light heart, and he took me at my word and the further bargain was completed. My wages were small at first, of course; but, with what I had in hand, they would keep me going no doubt till I could prove myself worth more to my employer.

In this manner I became one of Ripley's hands and later on myself a pamphleteer in a small way. I wrote to my father that evening and briefly acquainted him of my good fortune.

For some months my work was of a heterogeneous description. Ripley was legitimately a job printer, on rather a large scale, and a bookbinder. To these, however, he added a little venturesomeness in publishing on his own account, as also a considerable itch for scribbling. Becoming at a hint a virulent partisan in any extremist cause whatsoever, it will be no matter for wonder that his private room was much the resort of levelers, progressives and abolitionists of every creed and complexion. There furious malcontents against systems they

were the first to profit by met to talk and never to listen. There fanatical propagandists, eager to fly on the rudimentary wing stumps of first principles, fluttered into print and came flapping to the ground at the third line. There, I verily believe, plots were laid that would presently have leveled powers and potentates to the ground at a nod, had any of the conspirators ever possessed the patience to sit on them till hatched. This, however, they never did. All their fiery periphrastics smoked off into the soot of print and in due course lumbered the office with piles of unmarketable drivel.

Mr. Ripley had, however, other strings to his bow, or he would not have prospered. He did a good business in bookselling and was even now and again successful in the more conventional publishing line. In this connection I chanced to be of some service to him, to which circumstance I owed a considerable improvement in my position after I had been with him getting on a year. He had long contemplated, and at length begun to work upon, a series of handbooks on British birds and insects, dealt with county by county. In the compilation of these much research was necessary, wherein I proved myself a useful and painstaking coadjutor. In addition, however, my own knowledge of the subject was fairly extensive as regarded Hampshire, which county, and especially that part of it about Winton, is rich in lepidoptera of a rare order. I may say I fairly earned the praise he bestowed upon me, which was tinged, perhaps, with a trifle of jealousy on his part, due to the fact that the section I touched proved to be undoubtedly the most popular of the series, as judged subsequently by returns.

Not to push on too fast, however, I must hark back to the day of my engagement, which was marked by my introduction to one who eventually exercised a considerable influence over my destinies.

During the course of that first morning Mr. Ripley sent me for some copies of a pamphlet that were in order of sewing down below. By his direction I descended a spiral staircase of iron and found myself in the com-

posing-room. At a heavy iron-sheeted table stood my new-found friend, who was, despite his youth, the valued foreman of this department. He hailed me with glee and asked: "What success?"

"All right, thanks to you," I said; "and where may the bookbinding place be and Dolly Mellison?"

"Oh, you're for there, are you?" he said, with I thought a rather curious look at me, and he pointed to a side door.

Passing through this I found myself in a long room, flanked to the left with many machines and to the right with a row of girls who were classifying, folding or sewing the sheets of print recent from the press.

"I'm to ask for Dolly Mellison," I said, addressing the girl at my end of the row.

"Well, you won't have far to go," she said. "I'm her."

She was a pretty, slim lily of a thing, lithe and pale, with large gray eyes and coiled hair like a rope of sun-burned barleystraw, and her fingers petted her task as if that were so much hat-trimming.

"I'm sent by Mr. Ripley for copies of a pamphlet on 'The Supineness of Theologicians,'" I said.

"I'm at work on it," she answered. "Wait a bit till I've finished the dozen."

She glanced at me now and again without pausing in her work.

"You're from the country, aren't you?"

"Yes. How do you know?"

"A little bird told me. What gave you those red cheeks?"

"The sight of you," I said. I was growing up.

"I'm nothing to be ashamed of, am I?" she asked, with a pert laugh.

"You ought to be of yourself," I said, "for taking my heart by storm in that fashion."

"Go along!" she cried, with a jerk of her elbow. "None of your gammon! I'm not to be caught by chaff."

"It wasn't chaff, Dolly, though I may be a man of straw. Is that what you meant?"

"You're pretty free, upon my word. Who told you you might call me by my name?"

"Why, you wouldn't have me call you by any one else's? It's pretty enough, even for you."

"Oh, go away with you!" she cried. "I won't listen."

At that moment Duke put his head in at the door.

"The governor's calling for you," he said. "Hurry up."

"Well, they're ready," said the girl—"here," and she thrust the packet into my hands, with a little blushing half-impudent look at me.

I forgot all about her in a few minutes. My heart was too full of one only other girlish figure to find room in itself for a rival. What was Zyp doing now?—the wonderful fairy child, whose phantom presence haunted all my dreams for good and evil.

As I walked from the office with Duke Straw that afternoon—for, as it was Saturday, we left early—a silence fell between us till we neared Cringle's shop. Then, standing outside, he suddenly stayed me and looked in my face.

"Shall I hate or love you?" he said, with his mouth set grimly.

He made a gesture toward his deformed lower limbs with his hands, and shrugged his shoulders.

"No," he said; "what must be, must. I'll love you!"

There was a curious, defiant sadness in his tone, but it was gone directly. I could only stare at him in wonder.

"You're to be my house-fellow and chum," he said. "No, don't protest; I've settled it. We'll arrange the rest with Cringle."

And so I slept in a bed in London for the first time.

But the noise of a water wheel roared in my ears all night.

CHAPTER XV.

SWEET, POOR DOLLY.

"Trender," said Duke, unexpectedly after a silence the next morning, as we loitered over breakfast, "pay attention to one thing. I don't ask you for a fragment of your past history and don't want to hear anything about it. You'll say, as yet you haven't offered me your confidence, and quite right, too, on the top of our short acquaintance. But don't ever offer it to me, you understand? Our friendship starts from sunrise, morning by morning, and lasts the day. I don't mean it shall be the less true for that; I have a theory, that's all."

"What is it, Straw?"

"Sufficient for the day, it's called. Providence has elected to give us, not one existence, but so many or few, each linked to the next by an insensibility and intercalated as a whole between appropriate limits."

"I don't quite understand."

"Wait a bit. Each of these existences has its birth and death, and should be judged apart from the others; each is pronounced upon in succession by one's familiar spirit and its minutes pigeon-holed and docketed above there. When the chain of evidence, for or against, is complete, up these links are gathered in a heap and weighed in both sides of the balance."

"It sounds more plausible than it is, I think," said I, with frank discourtesy. "The acts of one day may influence those of the next—or interminably."

"That's your lookout; but they needn't necessarily. With each new birth comes a new capacity for looking at things in their right proportions."

"How far do you push your theory?"

"As far as you like. I'd have, all the world over, a daily revival of systems."

"Government—law?"

"Certainly. Of everything."

"Then justice, injustice, vindictiveness, must all revive, too."

"No. They're recalled; they don't revive."

"But must a criminal, for instance, be allowed to escape because they have failed to catch him the day he did the deed?"

"That's exactly it. It makes no difference. He couldn't atone here for an act committed by him during another existence. But that particular minute goes pretty red into its pigeon-hole, you may be sure."

"Oh, it's wild nonsense," I laughed. "You can't possibly be consistent."

"Can't I? Look here, you are my friend yesterday, and to-day, and always, I hope. I judge you daily on your merits, yet, for all I know, you may have committed murder in one of your past existences?"

The blood went back upon my heart. Then a great longing awoke in me to tell all to this self-reliant soul and gain comfort of my sorrow. But where was the good in the broad face of his theory?

"Well," I said, with a sigh, "I've done things at least I bitterly repent of."

"That's the conventional way of looking at it. Repentance in this won't avail a former existence. Past days of mine have had their troubles, no doubt, but this day I have before me unclouded and to do what I like with."

"Well, what shall we do with it?" said I. "I hand it over to you to make it a happiness for me. I dare say we shall find plenty of sorrows between sunrise and evening to give it a melancholy charm."

"Rubbish!" cried my friend. "Cant, cant, cant, ever to suppose that sorrow is necessary to happiness! We mortals, I tell you, have an infinite capacity for delight; given health, spiritual and bodily, we could dance in the sunbeams for eternity and never reach a surfeit of pleasure."

"Duke," said I—"may I call you Duke?"

"Of course."

"It puzzles me where you got—I don't mean offense—only I can't help wondering——"

"How I came to have original thoughts and a grammatical manner of speech? Look here——" he held up his stained fingers—"aren't these the hands of a man of letters?"

"And a man of action," I said, with a laugh. But——"

"It's no use, Renny. I can't look further back than this morning."

"You can recall, you know. You don't deny each existence that capacity?"

"Perhaps I could; but to what advantage? To shovel up a whole graveyard of sleeping remembrances to find the seed of one dead nettle that thrusts its head through? No, thank you. Besides, if it comes to that, I might put the same question to you."

"Oh, I can easily answer it. I get all my way of speaking from my father first, and, secondly, because I love books."

He looked at me oddly.

"You're a modest chicken," he said. "But I should like to meet your father."

I could not echo his wish.

"Still," he went on, "I will tell you, there was a little inexperience of mankind in your wonder. I think—I don't refer to myself, of course—that no man in the world is more interesting to talk with than the skilled mechanic who has an individuality and a power of expressing it in words. He is necessarily a man of cultivation, and an 'h' more or less in his vocabulary is purely an accident of his surroundings.

At this moment Mr. Cringle tapped at the door and walked into the room.

"I hope I see you ro-bust, gentlemen? And how do you like this village of ours, Mr. Trender?"

"It's dirty after Winton," said I.

"Ah," he said, condescendingly; "the centers of such enormous forces must naturally rise some dust. It's a

proud thing, sir, to contribit one's peck to the total. I feel it in my little corner here."

"Why," said I, "you surprise me, Mr. Cringle. I'm only an ignorant country lad, of course; but it seems to me you are quite a remarkable figure."

He gave an extra twist to his mustache and sniggered comfortably. "Well," he said, "it is not for me to contradict you—eh, Mr. Straw?"

"Certainly not," said Duke; "why, you are famous for your deeds."

"Very good, Mr. Straw, and perhaps, as you kindly mean it in the double sense. You mightn't think it, but it wants some knowledge of the law's mazes to turn a rough draft into a hold-fast agreement or indenture."

"And you can do that?"

"I flatter myself, Mr. Trender, that it'll want a microscoptic eye to find flaws in my phrasology."

He thrust back his head and expanded his chest.

"But I'm overlooking my errand," said he. "The young lady, as has called before, Mr. Straw, rung me down just now for a message to you."

"Oh, what was it?"

"She wanted to know if you was game for a walk and she'd be waiting under the market till half after nine."

"Very well," and Mr. Cringle took himself off.

"It's Dolly Mellison," said Duke to me. "We often go for a Sunday tramp together."

"Well, don't stop for me, if you want to go."

"We'll both go—why not?"

"Oh, not for anything. Fancy my intruding myself on her."

"I'll answer she'll not object," said my companion, and again I was half conscious of something unusual in his tone.

"But you might," said I.

"Not a bit of it. Why should I? We're not betrothed, you know."

He answered with a laugh, and pointed, or seemed to point at his twisted lower limbs. "You wouldn't believe

me, would you, if I told you she expects you?" he added.

"Oh, very well," said I, "if you put it in that way."

We found Dolly standing under the piazza of Covent Garden market. She made no movement toward us until we were close upon her, and then she greeted us with a shy wriggle and a little blush. She was very daintily dressed, with a fur tippet about her throat, and looked as pretty as a young Hebe.

"Oh," she said, "I didn't suppose you would come, too, Mr. Trender."

"There!" I cried to Duke, with perfect good nature. "I told you I should be in the way."

"Nonsense!" he said. "Miss Mellison didn't mean it like that, did you, Dolly?"

"Didn't I? You see how he answers for me, Mr. Trender?" And she turned half from him with a rosy pout.

"Come!" I cried gayly. "I'll risk it. I do not believe you've the heart to be cruel, Miss Mellison."

"Thank you for the surname, and also for telling me I'm heartless."

"You can't be that as long as mine goes a-begging," I said, impudently.

She peeped up at me roguishly from under her long lashes and shook her head.

"Come," said Duke, impatiently; "what are we going to do? Don't let's stand chattering here all day."

"I'll tell you," I cried in a sudden reckless flush of extravagance. "Aren't there pretty places on the Thames one can get to from here?"

"Oh, plenty," said Duke, dryly, "if one goes by train."

"Then let's go and make a pleasant water party of it."

He shook his head with a set of the lips.

"Those are rare treats," he said. "Our sort can't afford such jinks except after a deal of saving."

"I don't want you to," said I. "It's my business and you're to come as my guests."

"Oh, nonsense," he said, sharply; "we can't do that."

"Please speak for yourself, Mr. Straw," said Dolly. I

had noticed her eyes shine at the mere prospect. "If Mr. Trender is so kind as to offer, and can afford it, I'm sure, I, for one, don't intend to disappoint him."

"Can he afford it?" said Duke, doggedly.

"I shouldn't propose it if I couldn't," said I, very much on the high horse.

"Of course you wouldn't," said Dolly. "I wonder at you, Mr. Straw, for being so insulting."

"Very well," said Duke, "I meant it for the best; but let's be off. I'm for a shallop in Arcady, with Pleasure in a pork-pie hat (it's very pretty, Dolly) at the helm."

We went down to Richmond by train, and Duke—good fellow that he was—made a merry company of us. If he felt any soreness over his rebuff he hid it out of sight most effectually.

It was early in November—a beautiful, sparkling morning, and the river bore a fairish sprinkling of pleasure craft on its silvery stretches.

We were neither of us great oarsmen and at first made but poor way, owing to a tendency Duke of the iron sinews showed to pulling me completely round. But presently we got into a more presentable swing and fore-reached even upon a skiff or two whose occupants had treated us to some good-humored chaff upon our starting.

"Woa!" cried Duke. "This pulling is harder than pulling proofs, Renny. Let's stop by the bank and rest a bit."

We ran the boat's nose aground, fastened her painter to a stump and settled down for a talk.

"Enjoying yourself, Dolly?" asked Duke, mopping his forehead.

"Yes, of course—thanks to Mr. Trender."

"This is a fine variety on our walks, isn't it?"

"Oh, they're jolly enough when you're in a good temper."

"Am I not always?"

"Oh, I don't know. Sometimes you say things I don't understand."

"See there, Renny," cried Duke. "If I express myself badly she calls me cross."

"It isn't that," said the girl. "I know I'm ignorant and you're clever, but you seem to read me and then say things out of yourself that have nothing to do with me—just as if I was a book and you a—what do they call it?—cricket or something."

We both laughed aloud.

"Oh, Dolly," said Duke, "what pretty imp taught you satire? Are you a book to Mr. Trender?"

"Oh, no! He talks what I can understand."

"Better and better! But take comfort, Renny; you're downed in sweet company."

"Hush," said Dolly; "it's Sunday."

She dabbled her slender hand in the water and drew it out quickly.

"Oh," she cried, "it's cold. I hope we shan't be upset. Can you swim, Mr. Trender?"

"Yes, like a duck."

"That's a comfort, if I fall in. Mr. Straw, here, can't."

"I'm built top-heavy," said Duke, "but I'd try to save you, Dolly."

The girl's eyes shone with a momentary remorseful pity.

"I know you would," she said, softly; "you aren't one to think about yourself, Duke. How I wish I could swim! I don't believe there can be anything in the world like getting that medal they give you for saving people from drowning. Have you ever saved any one, Mr. Trender?"

Oh, gentle hand to deal so cruel a stroke! For a moment my smoldering sense of guilt flamed up blood-red.

"No, no," I said, with a forced laugh. "I'm not like Duke. I do think of myself. I'm afraid."

We lapsed into silence, out of which came Dolly's voice presently, murmuring a queer little doggerel song that seemed apt to her childish nature:

"'Who owns that house on yonder hill?"

Said the false black knight to the pretty little child on the road.

'It's my father's and mine,'

Said the pretty little child scarce seven years old.

"Will you let me in?"

Said the false black knight to the pretty little child on the road.

'Oh, no; not a step,'

Said the pretty little child scarce seven years old.

"Then I wish you deaf and dumb,"

Said the false black knight to the pretty little child on the road.

'And I wish you the same, with a blister on your tongue!'

Said the pretty little child scarce seven years old."

"Where on earth did you learn that?" said Duke, with a laugh, as Dolly ceased, her eyes dreaming out upon the shining river.

"I don't know. Mother used to sing it, I think, when I was a little girl."

"We must question her," said I.

"Mother's dead," said Dolly.

I could have bitten out my tongue.

Duke again exerted himself to put matters on a comfortable footing.

"Dolly and I are both orphans," said he; "babes in old Ripley's wood."

"And I am the remorseless ruffian," I broke in.

"All right. You didn't know, of course. Look at that girl on the bank, with the crinoline; she might be riding a hobby-horse."

"Ain't she a beauty?" said Dolly, enviously. Her own subscribing to the outrageous fashion then fortunately in its decay was limited to her slender means and the necessities of her work.

"You don't mean to say you admire her?" said I.

"Don't I, Mr. Trender? Just as she'd admire me if I was dressed like that."

"Heaven forbid, Dolly. I won't call you Dolly if you call me Mr. Trender."

"Won't you, now? Upon my word, you've got the impudence of twenty."

"Look here," said Duke, "I'm for paddling on. I don't know your views as to dinner, Mr. Renalt, but mine are getting pretty vociferous."

"My idea is to pull on till we sight a likely place, Mr. Duke Straw."

We rowed up past Kingston, a cockney town we all fought shy of, and on by grassy reaches as far as Hampton bridge, where we disembarked. Here was a pleasant water-side inn, with a lawn sloping down to the embankment, and, sitting in its long coffee-room, we made a hearty dinner and a merry company. Dolly was flushed and happy as a young naiad when we returned to our boat, and she rippled with laughter and sweetness.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FATEFUL ACCIDENT.

We loitered on the river till the short day was threatening dusk, and then we were still no further on our homeward way than a half-mile short of Kingston. A little cold wind, moreover, was beginning to whine and scratch over the surface of the water, and Dolly pulled her tippet closer about her bosom, feeling chilled and inclined to silence.

"Come," said Duke, "we must put our shoulders to it or we shan't get into the lock before dark."

"Oh!" cried the girl, with a half-whimper, "I had forgotten that horrible lock with its hideous weedy doors. Must we go through it?"

"I'm afraid so," said Duke; "but," he added cheerily, "don't you be nervous. We'll run you down and through before you have time to count a hundred—if you count slowly."

She sunk back in her seat with a frightened look and grasped the rudder lines, as if by them only could she hold on to safety. The dusk dropped about us as we pulled on, strain as we might, and presently we both started upon hearing a strangled sob break from the girl.

"Oh," said Duke, pausing for a moment, "this will never do, Dolly. Why, you can't be afraid with two such knights to protect you?"

"I can't help it," said the poor child, fairly crying now. "You don't know anything about the river, either of you; and—and mayn't I get out and walk?"

"Very well. One of us will go with you, while the other pulls the boat down. Only we must get across first. Steady, now, Renny; and cheer up, Doll, and put her nose to the shore opposite."

We had drifted some little distance since we first easy'd, and a dull booming, that was in our ears at the time, had increased to a considerable roar.

"Give way!" cried Duke; "turn her, Dolly!"

The girl tugged at the right line, gave a gasp, dropped everything, scrambled to her feet, and screamed in a dreadful voice: "We are going over the weir!"

"Sit down!" shouted Duke. "Pull, Renny, like a mad-man!"

He shipped his oar, forced the girl into a sitting posture and clutched the inner line all in a moment. His promptitude saved us. I fought at the water with my teeth set; the boat's nose plunged into the bank with a shock that sent us two sprawling, and the boat's stern swung round dizzily. But before she could cast adrift again I was on my knees and had seized at a projecting root with a grasp like Quasimodo's.

"Hold on!" cried Duke, "till I come to you. It's all right, Dolly; you're quite safe now."

He crawled to me and grasped the root in his more powerful hands.

"Now," he said, "you take the painter and get out and drag us higher, out of the pull of the water. I'll help you the best I can."

I complied, and presently the boat was drawn to a point so far above as to leave a wide margin for safety.

We took our seats to pull across, with a look at one another of conscious guilt. Dolly sat quite silent and pale, though she shivered a little.

"We didn't know the river, and that's a fact," whispered Duke to me. "Of course we ought to have remembered the lock's the other side."

We pulled straight across; then Duke said:

"Here's the shore, Dolly. Now, you and Trender get out, and I'll take the boat on."

"By yourself? No, I won't. I feel safe with you."

"Very well," he answered, gently. "We'll all go on together. There's really no danger now we know what we're about."

She cried, "No, Duke," in a poor little quaking voice.

We pulled into the lock cutting without further mishap, though the girl shrunk and blenched as we slid past, at a safe distance, the oblique comb of the weir.

It was some minutes before the lock-keeper answered to our ringing calls, and then the sluices had to be raised and the lock filled from our side. The clash and thunder of the hidden water as it fell into the pit below sounded dismal enough in the darkness, and must, I knew, be dinning fresh terror into the heart of our already stricken naiad. But the hollow noise died off in due course, the creaking gate lumbered open and we floated with a sigh of relief into the weltering pool beyond.

The sluices rattled down behind us, the keeper walked round to the further gate, and his figure appeared standing out against the sky, toiling with bent back at the levers. Suddenly I, who had been pulling bow, felt myself tilting over in a curious manner.

"Hullo!" I cried. "What's up with the boat?"

In one moment I heard a loud shout come from the man at the gates, and saw Dolly, despite her warning, stand hurriedly up and Duke make a wild clutch at her; the next, the skiff reeled under me and I was spun, kicking and struggling, into the water.

An accident, common enough and bad enough to those who know little of Thames craft, had befallen us. We had got the boat's stern jammed upon a side beam of the lock, so that her nose only dropped with the sinking water.

I rose at once in a black swirl. The skiff, jerked free by our unceremonious exit, floated unharmed in the lock, but she floated empty. Risen to the surface, however, almost with me, Duke's dark head emerged close by her,

so that with one frantic leap upward he was able to reach her thwarts, to which he clung.

"Dolly!" he gasped—"Dolly!"

I had seen her before he could cry out again, had seized and was struggling with her.

"Don't hold me!" I cried; "let me go, Dolly, and I'll save you."

She was quite beyond reason, deaf to anything but the despairing call of life. In another instant, I knew, we should both go under and be dragged into the rush of the sluices. Seeing the uselessness of trying to unclasp her hands, I fought to throw myself and her toward the side of the lock nearest. The water was bubbling in my mouth, when I felt a great iron hook whipped into the collar of my coat and we were both hauled to the side.

"Hold on there, mate!" cried the lock-keeper, "while I get your boat under."

I had caught at a dangling loop of chain; but even so the weight of my almost senseless burden threatened to drag me down.

"Be quick!" I gasped, "I'm pretty near spent."

With the same grapnel he caught and towed the boat, Duke still hanging to it, to where I clung, and leaped down himself into it.

"Now," he said, "get a leg over and you're right."

It was a struggle even then, for Dolly would not let me out of her agonized clutch—not till we could lay her, white as a storm-beaten lily, on the bottom boards. Then we turned and seized Duke over the thwarts and he tumbled in and lay in a heap, quite exhausted.

His mind relieved, our preserver took off his cap, scratched his forehead and spat into the water.

"I've known a many wanting your luck," he said, gruffly. "What made you do it, now?"

Judging our ignorance to be by no means common property, I said, "Ah, what?" in the tone that suggests acquiescence, or wonder, and asked him if he had a fire handy.

"There's a bright one burning inside," he said. "You're welcome to it."

He punted the boat to a shallow flight of steps, oozy with slime, that led to the bank above, where his cottage was.

"We'll carry the gal to it," said he. "See if she can move herself."

I bent down over the prostrate figure. It looked curiously youthful and slender in its soaked and clinging garments.

"Dolly," I whispered, "there's a fire above. Will you let me carry you to it?"

I thought my voice might not penetrate to her dulled senses, but to my wonder she put her arms round my neck immediately.

"Yes," she moaned, "I'm so cold. Take me to the warmth or I shall die."

We lifted her out between us and carried her into the house kitchen. There a goodly blaze went coiling up the chimney, and the sight was reviving in itself.

"Shall we leave you here alone a bit?" said I, "to rest and recover? There's to be no more of the river for us. We'll walk the distance that remains."

She gave me a quick glance, full of a pathetic gratitude, and whispered, "Yes; I'd better be alone."

"And if you take my advice," said our host, "you'll strip off them drowned petticoats and wrap yourself in a blanket I'll bring you while they're a-drying; wait, while I fetch it."

As he went out Dolly beckoned me quickly to her.

"I heard you tell me to leave go," she said, hurriedly, in a low voice; "but I couldn't—Renny, I couldn't; and you saved my life."

Her lips were trembling and her eyes full of tears. She clasped her hands and held them entreatingly toward me.

A gust of some strange feeling—some yearning sense of protection toward this pretty, lovable child—flooded my heart.

"You poor little thing," I whispered, in a pitying voice, and taking her two hands in one of mine I passed my other arm around her.

Then she lifted her face eagerly and I bent and softly dropped a kiss on her warm, wet lips.

The moment I had done it I felt the shame of my action.

"There, dear, forgive me," I said. "Like you, Dolly, I couldn't let go at once," and our friend returning just then with the blanket, we left the girl to herself and stepped outside.

A queer exultant feeling was on me—a sense as of the lightening of some overburdening oppression. "A life for a life." Why should the words ring stilly, triumphantly in my brain? I might earn for my breast a cuirass of medals such as Dolly had desired, and what would their weight be as set in the scale against the one existence I had terminated?

Perhaps it was not that. Perhaps it was that I felt myself for the first time in close touch with a yearning human sympathy; that its tender neighborhood taught me at a breath to respect and stand by what was noble in myself. The shadow that must, of course, remain with me always, I would not have away, but would only that it ceased to dominate my soul's birthright of independence.

There was in my heart no love for Dolly—no passion of that affinity that draws atom to atom in the destiny that is human. There was only the pitying protective sense that came to man through the angels, and, in its sensual surrender, marked their fall from divinity. For to the end, without one thought of wavering, Zyp must shine the mirage of my barren waste of love.

Suddenly I remembered, with a remorseful pang, that all this time I had forgotten Duke. I hurried down to the steps, calling him. He was sitting in the boat, his elbows on his knees, his face buried in his hands.

"Duke!" I cried, "come out and let's see what we can do for a dry. You'll get the frost in your lungs sitting there."

He rose at once, staggering a little. I had to run down the steps to help him ashore, where he stood shaken all through with violent shiverings.

"Whisky," said our host, laconically, watchful of the poor fellow, "and enough of it to make your hair curl."

Between us we got him into the house, where he was made to swallow at a gulp three finger-breadths in a tumbler of the raw spirit. Then after a time the color came back to his cheeks, the restored nerves to his limbs.

At that our kindly host made us strip, and providing us with what coverings he could produce, set us and our soaked belongings before a second fire in his little parlor, and only left us when summoned outside to his business. As the door closed behind him Duke turned to me. A sort of patient sorrow was on his face—an expression as of renunciation of some favored child of his fancy—I cannot express it better.

"You carried her in?" he said, quietly.

"Dolly? Yes."

"Where is she?"

"Baking before the kitchen fire. She'll be ready before we are."

"Well—I had no right. What a chapter of mishaps." Then he turned upon me with a sudden clap of fierceness. "Why did you ever propose this trip? I tried to dissuade you, and you might have known I was an idiot on the water."

"My good Duke," I answered, with a coolness that covered a fine glow of heat, "that don't sound very gracious. I meant it for a pleasure party, of course. Accidents aren't matters under human control, you know."

He struck his knee savagely.

"No," he muttered, "or I shouldn't have these."

Then in a moment the sweetness came back to his face, and he cried with a smile, half-humorous and all pathetic:

"Here's the value of my philosophy. I'm no more consistent than a Ripley pamphlet and not a quarter so amusing. But—oh, if I had only learned to swim!"

CHAPTER XVII.

A TOUCHING REVELATION.

For nearly four years did I work persistently, striving to redeem my past, at the offices in Great Queen Street. At this period my position was greatly improved, my services estimated at a value that was as honorable to my employer as it was advantageous to me. I had grown to be fairly at peace with myself and more hopeful for the future than I had once deemed it possible that I could ever be.

Not all so, however. The phantom light that had danced before my youthful eyes, danced before them still, no whit subdued in brilliancy. With the change to wider and manlier sentiments that I was conscious of in my own development, I fostered secret hope of a similar growth in Zyp. At 22, I thought, she could hardly remain the irresponsible, bewitching changeling she had been at 17. Womanliness must have blossomed in her, and with it a sense of the right relationship of soul to body. Perhaps even the glamour of mystery that must surround my manner of life had operated as a growing charm with her, and had made me, in her eyes, something the fascinating figure she always was and would be in mine.

Sometimes now, in thinking of him, I had fear of Jason, but more often not. Zyp's parting words to me—that were ever in my ears—seemed weighted with the meaning, at least, that had I fought my battle well I should have won.

To think of it—to recall it—always gave me a strange, troubled comfort. In my best moments it returned upon me, crying—crying the assurance that no selfish suit pressed by my brother could ever prevail over the inward preference her heart knew for me. In my worst, it did no more than trouble me with a teasing mock at

my human passion so persistent in its faith to a will-o'-the-wisp.

I think that all this time I never dared to put bravely to myself the thought—as much part of my being as my eyesight—that not for one true moment had I yielded my hope of Zyp to circumstances. All my diligence, all my labor, all my ambition, were directed to this solitary end—that some day I might lay them at her feet as bribes to her favor. Therefore, till self-convinced of their finished worthiness, I toiled on with dogged perseverance, studying, observing, perfecting, denying myself much rest and pleasure till my heart should assure me that the moment was come.

And what of them at the old haunted mill? News was rare and scanty, yet at intervals it came to link me with their destinies. The first year of my banishment my father wrote to me three times—short, rugged notes, void of information and negatively satisfactory only in the sense that, had anything of importance taken place, he would, I concluded, have acquainted me of it. These little letters were answered by me in epistles of ample length, wherein I touched upon my manner of life and the nature of my successes. The second year, however, the desultory correspondence was taken up by Jason, who wrote, as he talked, in a spirit of boisterous banter, and, under cover of familiar gossip, told me less, if possible, than my father had. Dad, he said in his first, had tired of the effort and had handed the task over to him. Therefore he acquitted himself of it in long leaps over gaps that covered months, and it was now more than four or five since I had received any sort of communication from him.

This did not greatly trouble me. There was that between us, which, it always seemed to me, he sought to give expression to in his letters—a hint secretly conveyed that I must never forget I lived and prospered on sufferance only. Now my own knowledge of the methods of justice, no less than the words Dr. Crackenthorpe had once applied to my case, had long been sufficient to assure me that I had little or nothing to fear from the

processes of the law. No less peremptory, however, was the conviction that Jason had it in his power to socially ruin me at a word; and the longer that word was delayed—that is to say, so long as my immunity did not clash with his interests—the better chance I had of testing and retesting my armor of defense. Yet, for all my care, he found out a weak place presently.

In the meantime I lived my life, such as it was, and found a certain manner of pleasure in it. Duke and I, still good friends, changed our lodgings, toward the last quarter of the fourth year, and moved into more commodious ones over an iron-monger's shop in Holborn. Here we had a sitting-room as well as a bedroom common to both of us, and tasted the joys of independence with a double zest.

Since our river experience it had become a usual thing for me to join my friend and Dolly in their frequent Sunday walks together. This, at first, I deprecated; but Duke would have it so; and finally it lapsed into an institution. Indeed, upon many occasions I was left to escort the girl alone, Duke pleading disinclination or the counter-attraction of some book he professed to be absorbed in.

Was I quite so blind as I appeared to be? I can hardly say myself. That the other entertained a most affectionate regard for the girl was patent. He was always to me, however, such a quaint medley of philosophical resignation and human susceptibility that I truly believe I was more than half inclined to doubt the existence in him of any strong bias toward the attractions of the other sex.

His behavior to Dolly was generally much more that of an elder brother toward a much younger half-sister born into the next generation, than of a lover who seeks no greater favor from a woman than that she shall keep the best secrets of her womanhood for him. He petted, indulged, and playfully analyzed her all in one. Now, thinking of him in the stern knowledge of years, I often marvel over the bitter incapacity of the other sex to choose aright the fathers of its children. How could the frailest, prettiest soul among them turn from such lumin-

ous depths as his to the meretricious foppery of emptier Parises?

But then I was greatly to blame. The winning ways of the girl, no less than Duke's persistent deprecation of any affectation of proprietorship in her, are my one excuse. A poor one, even then, for how may I cry out on simple-hearted Dolly, when I failed to read the little history of sorrow that was daily before my eyes. It was after events only that interpreted to me the pride that would not let the cripple kneel, a suitor to pity.

As to my own feelings toward the pretty soul I had once so basely linked to my own with an impulsive kiss—they were a compound of indulgence and a tenderness that fell altogether short of love. I desired to be on brotherly terms of intimacy with her, indeed, but only in such manner as to preclude thought of any closer tie. When she was shy with me upon our first meeting after that untoward contact in the lock-house, I laughed her into playfulness and would have no sentimental glamour attaching to our bond of sympathy. Alas! I was to learn how reckless a thing it is to seek to extinguish with laughter the fire of a woman's heart.

One Sunday afternoon in the early autumn of that fourth year, Dolly and I were loitering together about the slopes and byways of Epping forest. There is no season more attuned to the pathetic sympathies of young hearts than that in which the quiet relaxing of green life from its hold on existence speaks only to grayer breasts of premature decay and the vulgar ceremonial of the grave. Youth, however, recognizes none of this morbid aspect. To it the yellowing leaf, if it speaks of desolation, speaks from that "passion of the past" the poet strove to explore. It stands but two-thirds of the way up to the hill of years, and flowering stretches are beneath it to the rear and above, before its eyes, the fathomless sky and the great clouds nozzling the mountain crests like flocks of sheep.

All that afternoon as we wandered we came across lizards sprawling stupefied—as they will in October—on buskets of gorse, too exhausted, apparently, to feel

the prick of thorn or fear, and butterflies sitting on blades of grass with folded wings, motionless as those that are wired to bonnets. The air was full of a damp refreshing sweetness, and the long grass about every bush and hedge side began to stir with the movement of secret things, as though preparations for mystic revel were toward and invitations passing. I could almost see the fairy rings forming, noiseless, on the turf, when the lonely moon should hang her lantern out by and by.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A VOICE FROM THE CROWD.

Dolly had been unusually silent during the afternoon, and now, as we turned to retrace our steps in the direction of the station from which we were to take train for London, she walked beside me without uttering a word.

Suddenly, however, she put her hand upon my arm and stayed me.

"Renny," she said, "will you stop a little while? I want to speak to you."

"All right," I said; "speak away."

"Not here—not here. Come off the path; there's a seat out there."

Seeing with surprise that her face was pale and drawn with nervousness, and fancying our tramp might have over-tired her, I led her to the place she indicated—a bench set in the deep shadow of a chestnut tree—and we both sat down.

"Now, Doll," I said, gayly, "what's the tremendous confidence?"

"Renny," she said, quietly, "William Reid has asked me to marry him."

"No! William Reid—the young fellow over at Hansasard's? Well, I can only tell you, Dolly, that I know nothing but what's good of him for a steady and promis-

ing chap, who's sure to make as fine a husband as he is a workman."

"Do you advise me to take him, then? Do you want me to?"

"You might do much worse—indeed you might, Dolly. Why, to my knowledge, he's drawing £3 a week already. Of course I shall be very, very sorry to lose my little chum and companion, but I always foresaw that this would have to be the end of our comradeship some day."

She sat looking at the ground a little while and adjusting a fallen twig with the point of her parasol. Then she rose and said, in the same quiet tone, "Very well," and moved a step away.

I rose also and was about to resume the subject, when in a moment, to my horror, she threw herself back on the bench and, flinging her hands up to her face, burst into a passion of tears.

I was so startled and shocked that for the instant I could think of nothing to do or say. Then I bent down and cried:

"Dolly, what is it? What's the matter? Have I hurt you in any way?"

She struggled with her sobs, but made a brave effort to command herself.

"Oh, don't look, don't listen! I shall be all right in a minute."

I moved away a little space and stood anxiously waiting. When I turned again her face was still buried in her arm, but the keenness of the outburst was subdued.

I approached and leaned over her tenderly, putting a kind hand on her shoulder.

"Now, little woman," I said, "won't you tell me what it is? I might comfort and counsel you at least, Dolly, dear."

She answered so low that I had to stoop further to hear her.

"I only thought, perhaps—perhaps you might care more and not want me to."

What a simple little sentence, yet how fierce a vision it sprung upon my blindness! I rose and stepped back almost with a cry. Then Dolly sat up and saw my face.

"Renny," she cried, "I never meant to tell; only—only, I am so miserable."

I went to her and took her hand and helped her to her feet.

"Dolly," I said, in a low, hoarse voice, "I have been a selfish brute. I never thought what I was doing, when I should have thought. Now, you must give me time to think."

"You didn't know. Renny"—her pretty eyes were struggling with tears again, and her poor face looked up into mine, entreating me not to take base advantage of her surrender—"if I kissed you as you kissed me once do you think it would come?"

"It isn't right for us to try, dear."

Thank heaven my manhood stood the test—the inference so pathetic in its childish simplicity.

"Come," I said, "we will go back now. I want time to think it all over by myself. You mustn't refer to it again, Dolly, in any way—not till I can see you by and by alone."

She said, "Yes, Renny," humbly. Her very manner toward me was marked by a touching obedience.

We caught our train and sped back to London in a crowded compartment, so that the present embarrassment of *tete-a-tete* was spared us. At the terminus we parted gently and gravely on both sides and went each of us home.

Duke was in bed when I reached our lodgings, and for that I was grateful, for I felt far too upset and confused to relish the idea of a talk with him. Indeed, since the moment Dolly had confessed to me, he had hung strangely in the background of my thoughts. I felt a comfortless dawning of apprehension that all along he had been keen witness of the silent little drama in which unconsciously I was an actor—had sat in the pit and sorrowfully gauged the purport of the part I played.

I went to bed, but never to sleep. All night long I tossed, struggling to unravel the disorder in my brain. I could think out nothing collectively—warp and woof were inextricably confused.

At length, in despair, I rose, redressed and went outside. The church clocks clanged six as I stepped onto the pavement; there was a fresh-blown coolness in the dusky air; the streets stretched emptily to the dawn.

In the very contact with space, the tumult in my head settled down into some manner of order, and I was able to face, after a fashion, the problem before me.

Here, to one side, would I place Zyp; to the other Dolly. Let me plead to each, counseled by heart and conscience. To Zyp: You have and have ever had that of mine to which I can give no name, but which men call "love," as an expression of what is inexpressible. I know that this gift, this sixth sense, that, like the soul, embraces all the others, once acquired, is indestructible. For joy or evil I am doomed to it, spiritually to profit or be debased by it. You may scorn, but you cannot kill it, and exiled in material form from you here it will make to you in the hereafter as surely as a stone flung from a crater returns to the earth of which it is kin.

Say that the accidents of existence are to keep us here apart; that your heart desires to mate with another more picturesque than mine. It may be so. During these long four years you have never once directly, by word or sign, given proof that my being holds any interest for you. You banished me, I must remember, for all my efforts to torture hope out of them, with words designed to be final. What if I accept the sentence and say: "I yield my material form to one who desires its affections; who will be made most happy by the bestowal of them upon her; who yearns to me, perhaps, as I to you." I may do so and none the less be sure of you some day.

To Dolly: I have done you a bitter wrong, but one, I think, not irremediable. Perhaps I never thought but that friendship apart from love was possible between man and woman. In any case, I have given far too much consideration to myself and far too little to you. You

love me by your own confession, and, in this world of bitter troubles, it is very sweet to be loved, and loved by such as you. I am pledged, it seems, to a hopeless quest. What if I give it up? What if we taste joy in this world—the joy of a partnership that is graced by strong affection and cemented by a respect that shall be mutual? I can atone for my error to you here; my wilder love that is not to be controlled by moral reasoning I consign to futurity.

Thinking these thoughts, a picture rose before me of a restful haven, wherein my storm-beaten life might rock at anchor to the end; of Dolly as my wife, in all the fascination of her pretty, winning personality—her love, her playfulness, her wistful eyes and rosy mouth so responsive to laughter or tears. I felt very tender toward the child, who was glorified into woman by her very succumbing to the passion she had so long concealed. "Why should I struggle any longer?" I cried in my heart, "when an earthly paradise opens its gates to me; when self-sacrifice means peace and content, and to indulge my imagination means misery?"

It was broad daylight by the time I had touched some clew to the problem that so bewildered me, and suddenly I became aware that I was moving in the midst of a great press of people. They were all going in one direction and were generally of the lowest and most degraded classes in London. There was a boisterous and unclean mirth rampant among them. There was a ravenous eagerness of haste, too, that one seemed to associate instinctively with the hideous form of vampire that crouches over fields of slain and often completes what the bullet has but half done. Women were among them in numbers; some carrying infants in their gaunt, ragged arms; some plumed and decked as if for a gala sight.

I was weary with thought; weary with the monotony of introspection. Evidently there was some excitement toward, and to follow it up would take me out of myself.

Toiling up Ludgate hill we went, an army of tramping

feet. Then, like a sewer diverted, we wheeled and poured into the noisome alley of the Old Bailey.

In a moment the truth burst upon me with a shock. There was a man to be hanged that morning!

I twisted hurriedly about and strove to force my way out again. I might as easily have stayed the Thames with a finger. I was beaten back with oaths and coarse ribaldry—gathered up and carried ruthlessly in the rush for place—hemmed in, planted like a maggot in one great trunk of bestial and frouzy human flesh. Had I striven again I should have been smashed and pounded underfoot, all semblance of life stamped from me.

I looked about me in agony. Before and around was one huge sea of faces, from the level of which rose a jangling patter of talk and cries, like bubbles bursting on the surface of a seething tank of corruption. And under the grim shadow of Newgate there stood, in full view, a hideous machine. Barriers were about it, and a spruce cordon of officials, who stood out humanly in that garden of squalid refuse. It was black, with a black crossbeam; and from the beam a loop hung motionless, like a collar for death to grin through, and the crowd were already betting on the expression of his face when he should first see it.

I do not know how long or short a time my anguish lasted. It may have been half an hour, when the deep tolling of a bell wrought sudden silence in the fetid air. At its first stroke the roar of voices went off and lessened, rolling like a peal of thunder; at its third the quiet of eternity had fallen and consumed the world.

A mist came before my eyes. When it cleared I was aware of a little group on the platform, and one, with a ghastly white face, the center of it.

"Who is it?" I whispered, in intolerable agony.

"Curse you!" growled my next neighbor. "Can't you hold your tongue and let a cove look?"

A word marred the full relish of his appetite.

I managed to slew my head away from the direct line of vision. A low babble of voices came from the scaffold. He must be reprieved, I thought, with a leap of

the heart. I could not conceive voices sounding natural, otherwise, under such fearful circumstances.

Suddenly, as I was on the point of looking once more to ease my horrible tension of mind, there dropped upon my ears a low rumbling flap, and immediately a hoarse murmur went up from the multitude. Then, giving a cry myself, I turned my face. The rope hung down in a straight line, but loop and man were gone.

From the universal murmur, by claps and starts, the old uproar bubbled forth from the faces, till the pent-up street resounded with it. An after-dinner loquacity was on all and the fellow who had cursed me a minute ago addressed me now with over-brimming geniality of information.

"Who's him, says you? Why, where's your wits gone, matey? Him was Mul-ler, the greasy furriner as murdered old Briggs."

The trial had made sensation enough of late, but the date of the poor wretch's execution I had had no thought of.

When at last I could force a passage through the press—for they lingered like ghouls over the crumbs of the banquet—I broke into Holborn, with my whole soul panting and crying for fresh air and forgetfulness. It was hideous, it was inhuman, it was debasing, I cried to myself, to launch that quivering mass of terror into eternity in a public shambles! To such as came to see, it must be grossly demoralizing; to those who, like me, were enforced spectators, it was a sickening experience that must leave an impression of morbidity almost indelible.

Suddenly I felt a hand grasp my shoulder and a voice exclaim: "Renny, by all the saints!"

I turned—and it was Jason.

He held me at arm's length and cried again: "Renny? Really?—and a true sportsman as of old!"

Then he leaned to me and whispered with a grin: "I say, old fellow, if it wasn't for luck you might be any day where he stood just now."

CHAPTER XIX.

A MENACE.

At first I hardly grasped the import of my brother's words, or the fact that here was the old fateful destiny upon me again, so lost were the few faculties I could command in wonder at his unexpected appearance in London.

I stared and stared and had not a word to say.

"Where's your tongue, old chap?" he cried. "This is an affectionate greeting on your part, upon my word, and after near four years, too."

I pressed my hand across my forehead and strove to smooth the confusion therefrom.

"You must forgive me," I said at length; "this sudden meeting has driven me all abroad; and then I got stuck down there by mistake, and the sight has half-turned my brain, I think."

"By mistake, was it?" he said, with a mocking titter. "Oh, Renny, don't I know you?—though your looks are changed, too, for the matter of that; more than mine are, I expect."

I could well believe. Soul and manhood must have wrought new expression in me; but, for Jason, he was the Jason of old—fuller, more set and powerful; yet the same beautiful personality with the uninterpretable eyes.

"Well," he said, "aren't you surprised to see me?"

"Surprise isn't the word."

"Nor pleasure either, I expect."

"No. I should be a liar to say it was."

"Well, you used to be that, you know; though I dare say you've found out the better policy now."

"At any rate, as you're here, you'll come home with me, won't you?"

"Of course. That's what I intend. I've been in Lon-

don three or four days, and went over to your old place yesterday, but found you had left. I got the new address off a queer old chap there. Why didn't you tell us you had changed?"

"I did. I wrote to dad about it."

"Well, anyhow, he never told me."

"That seems funny. How is he?"

"Oh, the same old besotted curmudgeon as ever."

"Don't, Jason. Dad's dad for all his failings."

"Yes, and Zyp's Zyp for all hers."

It gave me a thrill to hear the old name spoken familiarly, though by such reckless lips.

"Is—is she all right?"

"She's Zyp, I tell you, and that means anything that's sprightly and unquenchable. Let her alone for a jade; I'm sick of her name."

Was it evident from this that his suit had not prospered? I looked at his changing eyes and my heart reeled with a sudden sick intoxication of hope. Was my reasoning to be all gone through with again? "Come," I said, "let's make for my place. A fellow-hand lives with me there."

We walked up Holborn together. He had eyes for every incident, a tongue that seldom ceased wagging. Many a smart and powdered working girl, tripping to her business, nudged her companion and looked after him. He accepted it all with a bold indifference—the masterful condescension that sets tight-laced breasts a-twittering under their twice-turned jackets. He was much better dressed than I was and carried himself with some show of fashion.

Duke had left when we reached home, and his absence I hardly regretted.

"Well," said my brother, as we entered the sitting-room, "you've decent quarters, Renny, and no doubt deserve them for being a good boy. You can give me some breakfast, I suppose?"

"If you don't mind eating alone," I said. "I've got no appetite."

"All the worse for you. I never lose mine." The table

was already laid as Duke had left it. I fetched a knuckle of ham from our private store and placed it before my unwelcome guest, who fell to with a healthy vigor of hunger.

"It's as well, perhaps, I didn't find you last night," he said, munching and enjoying himself. "We should have sat up late and then I might have overslept myself and missed the fun. I say, didn't he go down plump? I hoped the rope would break and that we should have it over again."

"Jason!" I cried, "drop it, won't you? I tell you I got caught there by mistake, and that the whole thing was horrible to me!"

"Oh, all right," he said, with a laugh. "I shouldn't have thought you'd have cared, but I won't say anything more about it."

I would not challenge word or tone in him. To what could I possibly appeal in one so void of the first instincts of humanity?

He pushed his plate away presently and fetched out a little pipe and began to smoke. I had sat all the time by the window, looking vaguely upon the crowded street.

"Now," I said, turning to him, "let's hear why you are in London?"

He raised his eyebrows with an affectation of perplexity.

"Didn't I tell you?" he said. "But there's nothing to explain. I wanted to come and I came."

"Four days ago?"

"More or less."

"But what brought you? Where did you get the money?"

"Never mind. That's my affair. I did get it, and there's an end."

"How long do you intend to stop?"

"It all depends upon circumstances. Maybe I shall get something to do here."

"Well, you might. I had nothing more to recommend me than you have when I first came."

"Not so much, my good fellow."

He threw out his chest and a whiff of smoke together.

"I've more about me to take the fancy, I believe, and I'm not handicapped with a depressing secret for the unscrupulous to trade upon. Besides, you forget that I've a friend at court, which you never had."

"Meaning me. It's no good, I can tell you in the very beginning. I've not influence enough with my employer to foist a useless fresh hand upon him."

"We'll see, my friend—we'll see, perhaps, by and by. I'm not in any hurry. I haven't the slightest intention of working till I'm forced to."

"I suppose not. But what are you going to do in the meantime?"

"Enjoy life, as I always do."

"Here, in London?"

"Yes, of course."

"We can't put you up at this place. It's impossible."

"Wait till you're asked. I've got my own quarters."

"Where?"

"Find out if you can. I keep my private burrow secret."

"Well, it's all very queer, but I suppose you know your own business best."

"Naturally," he said, and sat frowning at me a little while.

Then presently he rose and came and looked down upon me.

"Renny," he said, quietly, "I'm going now, but I shall look you up from time to time. I just want to say a thing first, though. You haven't received me very well, and I shan't forget it. There's a new manner about you that's prettier than it's quite safe. You seem to have thought matters over and to have come to the conclusion that this lapse of years has tided you over a little difficulty we remember. I only want to suggest that you don't presume upon that too far. Grant it to be true, as old Crackenthorpe said, that that fellow Muller's fate

isn't likely to be yours. I can make things pretty hot for you, nevertheless."

He nodded at me once or twice, with his lips set, and so walked from the room.

For an hour after he had gone, regardless of the calls of business, I sat on by the window pondering the meaning of this down-swoop and its likely influence on my fortunes.

The nervous apprehension of boyhood had left me; I had carved out an independent path for myself and had prospered. Was it likely that, thus restored, as it were, to manliness, I could weakly succumb to a sense of fatality? I was stronger by nature and experience than this blackest of blackmailers. He who takes his moral fiber from humanity must necessarily surpass the egotist who habitually drains upon himself.

As to the mere fact of my brother's journey hither, and his acquirement of the means which enabled him to do so and to present a becoming appearance, I cared to speculate but little. London was the natural goal of his kind, and when the migratory fit came he was bound by hook or by crook to gather the wherewith for his flight.

It was the immediate presence of his blackrent mood that I had to combat, and I found myself strong to do so. I would not own his mastery; I would anticipate him and force the crisis he wished to postpone for his own gain and my torment. That very evening would I tell Duke all and abide by his judgment.

And Dolly? Here on the instant I compromised with manliness and so admitted a weak place in my armor. Viewed through the dizzy mist of my own past and haunted suffering, this sweet and natural child stood out, such a tender vision of innocence that I dared not arrogate to myself the right of informing it with an evil that must be negative only in the first instance. How can I imperil her soul, I thought, by shattering at a blow the image, my image, that enlightens it? Sophistry—sophistry; for what true woman is the worse for learning that her idol is poor humanity after all—not a thing to wor-

ship, but a soul to help and protect—a soul thirsting for the deep wells of sympathy?

Had I been wise to forestall my brother with all whose influence was upon my life a great misery might have been averted. In this instance I temporized, and the fatal cloud of calamity rose above the horizon.

Why was it that, at the first, Dolly was much more in my mind than Zyp? That I cannot answer altogether, but so it was. The balance of my feelings was set no differently; yet, while it seemed quite right and proper that Zyp should estimate me at my dual personality, I shrunk with shuddering from the thought of Dolly knowing me as I knew myself. Perhaps it was that, for all my sense of passionate affinity to the wild creature once so part of my destinies, I recognized in the other the purer soul; that it was the love of the first I desired, the good will of the second. Perhaps, also, the recognition of this drove me on again to abide by my decision of the morning. It is useless to speculate now; for the little unhappy tale ended otherwise than as I had prefigured it. My day had begun with an omen as ghastly as its sequel was to be.

CHAPTER XX.

DUKE SPEAKS.

That evening, in the luminous dusk of our sitting-room, I sat up and gave Duke my history. He would have stopped me at the outset, but I would brook no eccentric philosophy in the imperious fever of insistence that was my mood. I told him of all that related personally to me—my deed, my repentance—my brother's exposure and renewed menaces; but to Zyp I only referred in such manner as to convey the impression that whatever influence she had once exerted over me was dead with boyhood and scarcely to be resurrected.

That here I intentionally told a half-truth only, cowardly in the suspicion that the whole would be resented by

my hearer on Dolly's behalf, I cannot deny. I dared not commit myself to a policy of absolute confidence.

When I had finished there was a silence, which I myself was forced to at length break.

"Duke," I said, "haven't you a remark to make—no word of advice or rebuke?"

"Not one, Renny. What concern have we with that past existence of yours?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake drop that nonsense for once in a way. It's a very real trouble to me, whatever it is to you."

"Old man, you did and you repented in one day. The account up there must balance."

"You think it must?"

"We are masters of our acts—not of our impulses. You strike a bell and it clangs. You strike a man and the devil leaps out at his eyes. It's in the rebound that the thought comes that decides the act. In this case yours was natural to yourself, for you are a good fellow."

"And so are you, a hundred times over, to take it so. You don't know the terror it has been to me—that it must be to me still in a measure. The account may balance; but still——"

"Well?"

"The boy—my brother—died."

"Yes—after you had tried to save him."

"Duke—Duke, you can't hold me not to blame."

"I don't, indeed. You were very much to blame for not retreating when your better angel gave you the chance. It's for that you'll be called to account some day—not the other."

"Well, I'll stand up and cry 'peccavi!'" I said, sadly.

"Renny," said Duke, from the shadow of his side of the room, "what's this elder brother of yours like?"

I explained Jason's appearance to the best of my power.

"Ah," he said, quietly, "I thought so."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing. Only I saw him this afternoon taking the bearings of the office from t'other side the street."

"Very likely. He mentioned something about using my influence with Ripley to give him a berth later on. Probably he was debating his ground."

"You haven't given your confidence to any one but me in this matter?"

"No."

"Do you intend to?"

"If you think it right. Shall I tell Ripley?"

"It's my opinion you should. Forestall your brother in every direction."

"Well, yours and his are the only two that concerns me."

"One other, Renny."

"Who?"

"Dolly."

He leaned forward and looked at me with such intensity of earnestness that his black eyes seemed to pierce to my very soul.

"Shall I," he said—and his gaze never left my face—"shall I acknowledge your confidence with another?"

"It shall be sacred, Duke," I answered low, "if it refers to past or present."

He threw himself back with a sudden wail.

"To both!" he cried; "to both!"

He was himself again directly.

"Bah!" he cried; "what a woman I am! Renny, you shall for once find me sick of philosophy and human."

I resumed my seat, fairly dumfounded at this revelation of unwonted depths in my friend, and stared at him in silence; once more he leaned forward and seemed to read me through.

"Renny, tell me—do you wish to make Dolly your wife?"

"Duke, upon my soul I don't know."

"Do you love her?"

"If I thought I did, as you meant it, I could answer your first question."

"And you can't?"

"No, I can't."

"Renny, make her happy. She loves you with all her heart."

"Would that be fair to her, Duke? Let me know my own mind first."

"Ah, I am afraid you don't care to know it; that you are playing with a pleasurable emotion. Take care—oh, take care, I tell you! The halt and maimed see further in the dark than the vigorous. Renny, there is trouble ahead. I know more of women than you do, perhaps, because, cut off from manly exercises, I can gauge their temptations and their weaknesses. I see a way of striking at you that you don't dream of. Be great with resolve! Save my little book-sewer, I implore you."

"Duke," I said, with extreme emotion, for I fancied I could catch the shine of most unaccustomed tears in his dark eyes, "my good, dear fellow, what is the meaning of this? I would do anything to make you or Dolly happy; but where is the sense of half-measures? If you feel like this, why don't you—I say it with all love—why don't——"

He struggled to his feet, and with a wild, pathetic action drew emptiness about him with enfolding arms.

"I tell you," he cried, in a broken voice, "that I would give my life to stand in your shoes, valuing the evil as nothing to the sweet."

He dropped his head on his breast and I had no word to say. My willful blindness seemed to me at that moment as vile a thing as any in my life.

Suddenly he stood erect once more.

"Renny," he said, with a faint smile, "for all your good friendship you don't know me yet, I see. I'm too stiff-jointed to kneel."

"Don't curse me for blighting your life like this. But, Duke—I never guessed. If I had—it didn't matter to me—I would have walked over a precipice rather than cross your path."

"How could you know? Wasn't I sworn to philosophy?"

"And it can't be now?"

"It can never be."

"Think, Duke—think."

"I never do anything else. Love may exist on pity, but not on charity. I put myself on one side. It is her happiness that has to be considered first; and, Renny, you know the way to it."

"Duke, have you always felt like this toward her?"

"Always? I feel here that I should answer you according to my theory of life. But I have shown you my weak side. Every negro, they say, worships white as the complexion of his unknown God. From my first sight of her I have tried to rub my sooty soul clean—have tried every means like the 'Black-Gob' committee in Hood's poem."

"I think you have been successful—if any rubbing was necessary. I think at least you have proved your affinity to her, and will claim and be claimed by her in the hereafter."

"I shall not have the less chance then, for striving to procure her happiness here."

"Oh, Duke—no!"

I stood abashed in presence of so much lofty abrogation of self.

"What am I to do?" I said, humbly. "I will be guided by you. Shall I study to make our interests one and trust to heaven for the right feeling?"

"First tell her what you have told me. You need have no fear."

"Very well. I will do so on the first opportunity."

"That confidence alone will make a bond between you. But, Renny—oh, don't delay."

"I won't, Duke—I won't. But I wish you would tell me what danger it is you fear."

"If I did you would think it nothing but a phantom of my brain. I have said I see in the dark. This room is full of fantastic shapes to me. Perhaps they are only the goblin lights born of warp and disease."

"I will speak to her next Sunday."

"Not sooner?"

"I can't very well. We must be alone together without risk of interruption."

I would have told him of our yesterday's talk, only

that it seemed a cruel thing to take even him into that broken and tender confidence.

"Very well. Let it be then, as you value her happiness."

All day it had been close and oppressive and now thunder began to moan and complain up the lower slopes of the night.

Suddenly, in the ominous stirring of the gloom, I became conscious that my companion was murmuring to himself—that a low current of speech was issuing from his lips monotonous as the babble of delirium.

"There was a window in the roof, where stars glittered like bubbles in the glass—and the ceiling came almost down to the floor on one side and I cried often with terror, for the window and I were alone. Sometimes the frost gathered there, like white skin over a wound, and sometimes the monstrous clouds looked in and mocked and nodded at me. I was very cold or else my face cracked like earth with the heat, and I could not run away, for he had thrown me down years before and the marrow dried in my bones. There had been a time when the woman came with her white face and loved me, always listening, and crept away looking back. But she went at last and I never saw her again."

"Duke!" I whispered—"Duke!" but he seemed lost to all sense of my presence.

"He came often, and there was a great dog with him, whose flesh writhed with folds of gray, and the edges of his tongue were curled up like a burning leaf—and the dog made my heart sick, for its eyes were full of hate like his, and when he made it snarl at me I shivered with terror lest a movement of mine should bring it upon me. And sometimes I heard it breathing outside the door and thought if they had forgotten to lock it and it came in I should die. But they never forgot, and I was left alone with the window in the roof and nothing else. But now I feel that if I could meet that dog—now, now I should scream and tear it with my teeth and torture it inch by inch for what it made me suffer."

I cried to him again, but he took no heed.

"There was water, in the end, and great dark buildings went up from it and the thunder was thick in the sky. Then he said, 'Drink,' and held something to my lips; and I obeyed because I was in terror of him. It was fire he gave me, and I could not shriek because it took me by the throat—but I fell against the water and felt it lap toward me and I woke screaming and I was in a boat—I was in a boat, I tell you."

There came a booming crash overhead and the room for a moment weltered with ghastly light. In its passing I saw Duke leap to his feet, and there was something beside him—a shape—a mist—one of the phantoms of his brain—no, of mine—Modred, pointing and smiling. It was gone in an instant—a mere trick of the nerves. But, as I stood shivering and blinded, I heard Duke cry in a terrible voice:

"Renny—listen! It was on such a night as this that my father poisoned me!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CALM BEFORE.

Long after the storm had broken and rolled away were we still sitting talking in the dim lamplight. In these hours I learned what dark confidences my friend had to give me as to his solitary and haunted past; learned more truly, also, than I had ever done as yet, the value of a moral courage that had enabled him, dogged by the cruelest hate of adversity, to emerge from the furnace noble and thrice refined.

He had been picked up, as a mere child drowning in the river, by the Thames police and had been ultimately consigned to a charity school, from which, in due course, he had been apprenticed to a printer. Thus far had his existence, emerging from profoundest gloom, run a straight and uneventful course—but before?

Into what deadly corner of a great city's most secret

burrows his young life had been first hemmed and then crushed out of shape who may say? When I had got him down again, unnerved but quiet now and wistful with apology over his outburst, he told me all that he knew.

"Thunder always seems to turn my brain a little, Renny, perhaps because it is associated in the depths of my mind with that strange young experience. The muttering sound of it brings a picture, as it were, before my eyes. I seem to see a confusion of wharfs and monstrous piles of blackness standing out against the sky; deadly water runs between, in which smudges of light palpitate and are splintered into arrows and come together again like drops of quicksilver."

"And you are given something to drink?"

"It is poison; I know it as certainly as that it is my father who wishes to be quit of me. I can't tell you how I know."

"And before?"

"There is only the room and the window in the roof, and myself, a sickly cripple lying in bed, always alone and always fearful of something."

"Duke, was the gentle woman your mother?"

"I feel that it must have been. But she went after a time. Perhaps he killed her as he wished to kill me."

"Can you remember him at all?"

"Only through a dreadful impression of cruelty. I know that I am what I am by his act; though when made so, or under what provocation, if any, is all a blank. It is the dog that haunts my memory most. That seems queer, doesn't it? I suppose it was the type or symbol of all the hate I was the victim of, and I often feel as if some day I shall meet it once more—only once more—and measure conclusions with it on that little matter of the suffering it caused me."

We fell silent for awhile. Then said I, softly: "Duke, with such a past for background, I think I can understand how Dolly must stand out in the front of your picture."

"Yes," he said, with a tender inflection in his voice. "But anyhow I have no quarrel with her sex. What

should I have been without that other presence in the past? I have known only two women intimately. For their sake my right arm is at the service of all."

His eyes shone upon me from the sallow, strong face. He looked like a crippled knight of errantry, fearless and dangerous to tamper with where his right of affection was questioned.

The week that followed was barren of active interest. It was a busy one at Great Queen street, and all personal matters must needs be relegated to the background. Occasionally I saw Dolly, but only in the course of official routine, and no opportunity occurred for us to exchange half a dozen words in private.

Nevertheless, there was in the dusty atmosphere of the place a sensation of warmth and romance that is scarcely habitual to the matter-of-fact of the workshop. Compromise with my heart as I might on the subject of Zyp's ineffaceable image, I could not but be conscious that Ripley's at present held a very pretty and tender sentiment for me. The sense of a certain proprietorship in it was an experience of happiness that made my days run rosilily, for all the perplexity in my soul. Yet love, such as I understood it in its spiritual exclusiveness, was absent; nor did I ever entertain for a moment the possibility of its awakening to existence in my breast.

So the week wore on and it was Saturday again, and to-morrow, for good or evil the question must be put.

That evening, as Duke and I were sitting talking after supper, Jason's voice came clamoring up the stairs and a moment after my brother burst into the room. He was in high spirits—flushed and boisterous as a young Antinous—and he flung himself into a chair and nodded royally to Duke.

"Renny's chum, I suppose?" said he. "And that's a distinction to be proud of, for all it's his brother that says so. Glad to know you, Straw."

Duke didn't answer, but he returned the nod, striving to gloze over prejudice genially for my sake.

"Renny, old chap!" cried Jason, "I sha'n't want my

friend at court yet—not yet, by a long chalk, I hope. Look here.”

He seized a purse from his pocket and clapped it down on the table with a jingling thud.

“There’s solid cash for you, my boy! Forty-three pounds to a penny, and a new pleasure to the pretty face of each of ’em.”

“Where on earth did you get it, Jason?”

“Won’t you be shocked, Barebones? Come with me some night and see for yourself.”

“You’ve been gambling, I believe.”

“Horrid, isn’t it?—the wailing baby and the deserted wife and the pistol in a garret—that’s what you are thinking of, eh? Oh, you dear thing! But we aren’t built alike, you and I.”

“Be quiet, can’t you?” I cried, angrily.

“Not a bit of it. I’m breezy as a weathercock to-night. I must talk, I tell you, and you always rouse the laughing imp in me. Where’s the harm of gambling, if you win? Eh, Jack Straw?”

“It’s no very good qualification for work, if that’s what you want to get, Mr. Trender.”

“Work? Hang the dirty rubbish! Work’s for the poor in pocket and in spirit. I want to see life; to feel the sun of enjoyment down to my very finger-tips. You two may work, if you like, with your codes of cranky morals. You may go back to your mill every Monday morning with a guilty sense of relief that another weekly dissipation on Hampsted heath is over and done with. That don’t do for me. The shops here aren’t all iron-ware and stationery. There’s color and glitter and music and rich food and laughter everywhere around, and I want my share of it. When I’m poor I’ll work; only—I don’t ever intend to be poor again.”

“Well, we don’t any of us intend to, for the matter of that,” said Duke.

“Oh, but you go the wrong way about it. You’re hampered in the beginning with the notion that you were made to work, and that if you do it in fine manly fashion your wages will be paid you in full some day. Why,

what owls you are not to see that those wages that you think you are storing up so patiently are all the time being spent by such as me! Here's happiness at your elbow, in the person of Jason Trender—not up in the skies there. But it's your nature and luckily that's my gain. You wouldn't know how to enjoy ten thousand a year if you had it."

"You think not?"

"I know it. You'd never be able to shake off the old humbug of responsibility."

"Toward others, you mean?"

"Of course I do, and that's not the way to make out life."

"Not your way?"

"Mine? Mine's to be irresponsible and independent—to act upon every impulse and always have a cat by me to claw out the chestnuts."

"A high ideal, isn't it?"

"Don't fire that nonsense at me. Ideal, indeed! A cant term, Jack Straw, for a sort of religious mania. No ideal ever sparkled like a bottle of champagne. I've been drinking it for the first time lately and learning to play euchre. I've not proved such a bad pupil."

He slapped the pocket to which he had returned his purse, with a joyous laugh.

"Champagne's heaven!" he cried. "I never want any better. Come out with me to-morrow and taste it. Let's have a jaunt!"

Duke shook his head.

"We shouldn't agree in our notions of pleasure," said he.

"Then, come you, Renny, and I'll swear to show you more fun in a day than you've known in all your four years of London."

"I can't, Jason. I've got another engagement."

"Who with?"

"Never mind. But I can't come."

"Oh, rubbish! You'll have to tell me or else we go together."

"Neither the one nor the other."

For a moment he looked threatening. "I'm not fond of these mysteries," he said. Then his face cleared again.

"Well," he cried, "it's a small matter for me, and, after all, you don't know what you miss. You don't keep whisky here, I suppose?"

"No, we don't drink grog, either of us."

"So I should have thought. Then I'll make for livelier quarters"—and crying good-night to us, he went singing out of the room.

The moment I heard the outer door shut on him, I turned to Duke.

"Don't hold me responsible for him," I said. "You see what he is."

"Renny," said Duke, gravely, "I see that friendship is impossible to him, and can understand in a measure what he made you suffer."

"Yet, I think, it's true that he's of the sort whom fortune always favors."

"They sign a compact in blood for it, though, as the wicked baron does in the story books."

He smiled and we both fell silent. Presently Duke said from the darkness:

"Where has he put up in London?"

"I don't know. He wouldn't say. I'm not particularly anxious to find out as long as he keeps away from here."

"Ah, as long as he does," said my companion, and sunk into a pondering fit again.

"Get off early to-morrow," he said, suddenly. "What time have you arranged to—to meet Dolly?"

"Half-past nine, Duke."

"Not before? Well, be punctual, there's a good fellow. She's worth an effort."

I watched him, as he rose with a stifled sigh and busied himself over lighting our bedroom candle. In the gusty dance of the flame his eyes seemed to change and glint red like beads of garnet. I had no notion why, but a thrill ran through me and with it a sudden impulse to seize him by the hand and exclaim: "Thank God, we're friends, Duke!"

He startled a little and looked full in my face, and then I knew what had moved me.

Friends were we; but heaven pity the man who made him his enemy!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SHADOW OF THE STORM.

Dolly met me the next morning, looking shy and half-frightened as a child caught fruit-picking. She gave me her hand with no show of heartiness, and withdrew it at once as if its fingers were the delicate antennae of her innocent soul and I her natural enemy.

"Where shall we go, Renny?" she asked, glancing timidly up at me.

"To Epping again, Dolly, dear. I've set my heart on it."

She seemed at first as if about to ask me why; then to shrink from a subject she dreaded appearing to have a leading interest in.

"Very well," she answered, faintly. "It will be lovely there now."

"Won't you help a poor woman to a crust of bread, kind lidy?" said a voluble whining voice at our ears, and a sturdy mendicant thrust her hand between us. She was a very frouzy and forbidding-looking mendicant, indeed, with battered bonnet askew and villainous small eyes, and her neighborhood was redolent of gin.

"Spare a copper, kind lidy and gentleman," she entreated, with a bibulous smirk, "and call down the blessings of 'eving on a widowed 'art as 'an't tysted bit or sup since yesterday come to-morrer, and five blessed children wantin' a 'ome, which it's the rent overdue and these 'ands wore to knife powder scrapin' in the gutters for scraps which one crust of bread would ease. Kind lidy, oh, just a copper."

Dolly was for putting a charitable hand into her

pocket as the creature followed us, but I peremptorily stopped her and would not have her imposed upon.

"Kind lidy," continued the woman, "I've walked the streets all night since yesterday morning and the soles off my feet, kind lidy; won't you spare a copper? And I dursn't go 'ome for fear of my man, and I buried the youngest a week come yesterday, and praise 'eving I'm a lonely widder, without child or 'usband, kind lidy; just a copper for the funeral—and rot the faces off of you for a couple of bloomin' marks in your silks and satings and may you die of the black thirst with the ale foam in barrils out of reach. You a lidy? Oh, yes, sich as cocks her nose at a honest woman starvin' in her rags, and so will you some day, for all your pink cheeks, when you've been thrown over like this here bloomin' bonnet!"

She screamed after us and caught the moldy relic from her head and slapped it upon the pavement in a drunken frenzy, and she reviled us in worse language than I can venture to record. Poor Dolly was frightened and urged me tremblingly to hurry on out of reach of that strident, cursing voice. I was so angry that I would have liked to give the foul-mouthed harridan into custody, but the nervous tremors of my companion urged me to the wiser course of leaving bad alone, and we were soon out of earshot of the degraded creature.

"Renny," whispered the girl in half-terrified tones, "did you hear what she said?"

"What does it matter what she said, Dolly?"

"She cursed me. God wouldn't allow a curse from a woman like that to mean anything, would He?"

"My dear, you must cure yourself of those fancies. God, you may be sure, wouldn't use such a discordant instrument for His divine thunders. The market value of her curse, you see, she put at a copper."

She looked up at me with her lips quivering a little. She was evidently upset, and it was some time before I could win her back to her own pretty self.

"I wish the day hadn't begun like this," she said in a low voice.

"It shall come in like the lion of March, Dolly, and go out like a lamb—at least, I hope so."

"So do I," she whispered, but with the fright still in her eyes.

"Why, Dolly," I said, "I could almost think you superstitious—and you a Ripley hand!"

She laughed faintly.

"I never knew I was, Renny. But everything seemed bright and peaceful till her horrible voice ground it with dust. I wonder why she said that?"

"Said what, Dolly?"

"That about being thrown over."

"Now, Doll, I'll have no more of it. Leave her to her gin palace and set your pretty face to the forest. One, two, three and off we go."

We caught our train by the tail, as one may say, and took our seats out of breath and merry. The run had brought the bloom to my companion's face once more and the breeze had ruffled and swept her shining hair rebellious. She seemed a very sweet little possession for a dusty Londoner to enjoy—a charming garden of blossom for the fancies to rove over.

Ah, me; how can I proceed; how write down what follows? The fruit was to fall and never for me. The blossoms of the garden were to be scattered underfoot and trodden upon and their sweet perfume embittered in death.

As we walked down the platform a voice hailing me made the blood jump in my heart.

"Renny—Renny! What brings you here? Why, what a coincidence! Well met, old fellow! And I say, won't you introduce me?"

"Miss Mellison—this is my brother." I almost added a curse under my breath.

I was striving hard for self-command, but my voice would only issue harsh and mechanical. He had overreached me—had watched, of course, and followed secretly in pursuit.

"How delighted I am to meet you," he said. "Here was I—only lately come to London, Miss Mellison—

sick for country air again and looking to nothing better than a lonely tramp through the forest and fate throws a whole armful of roses at me. Are you going there, too? Do let me come with you."

Dolly looked timidly up at me. We had left the station and were standing on the road outside.

"Oh, Miss Mellison's shy in company," I said. "Let's each go our way and we can meet at the station this evening.

"I'm sure you won't echo that," said Jason, looking smilingly at the girl. "I see heaven before me and he wants to shut me out. There's an unnatural brother for you."

"It seems unkind, don't it, Renny? We hadn't thought to give you the slip, Mr. Trender. Why, really, till now I didn't even know of your existence."

"That's Renalt's way, of course. He always wanted to keep the good things to himself. But I've been in London quite a long time now, Miss Mellison, and he hasn't even mentioned me to you."

Dolly gave me a glance half-perplexed, half-reproachful.

"Why didn't you, Renny?"

I struggled to beat down the answer that was on my lips: "Because I thought him no fit company for you."

"I didn't see why I should," I said, coolly. "I'm not bound to make my friends his."

"How rude you are—and your own brother! Don't mind him, Mr. Trender. He can be very unpleasant when he chooses."

She smiled at him and my heart sunk. Was it possible that his eyes—his low musical voice—could he be taking her captive already?"

"Come," I said, roughly. "We're losing the morning chattering here, Dolly. You're not wanted, Jason. That's the blunt truth."

Dolly gave a little, pained cry of deprecation.

"Don't, Renny! It's horrible of you."

"I can't help it," I said, savagely. "He's as obtuse as a tortoise. He ought to see he's in the way."

"You give me credit for too delicate a discrimination, my good brother. But I'll go if I'm not wanted."

"No, you sha'n't, Mr. Trender. I won't be a party to such behavior."

I turned upon the girl with a white face, I could feel.

"Dolly," I said, hoarsely. "If he goes with you, I don't!"

Her face flushed with anger for the first time in my knowledge of her.

"You can do just as you like, Renny, and spoil my day if you want to. But I haven't given you the right to order me about as if I was a child."

Without another word I turned upon my heel and left them. I was furious with a conflicting rage of emotions—detestation of my brother, anger toward Dolly, baffled vanity and mad disappointment. In a moment the sunshine of the day had been tortured into gloom. The sting of that was the stab I felt most keenly in the first tumult of my passion. That this soft caprice of sex I had condescended to so masterfully in my thoughts should turn upon and defy me! I had not deemed such a thing possible. Had she only played with me after all, coquetting and humoring and rending after the manner of her kind? Were it so, she should hear of the mere pity that had driven me to patronizing consideration of her claims; should learn of my essential indifference to her in a very effectual manner.

I am ashamed to recall the first violence with which, in my mind, I tortured that poor gentle image. As my rage cooled, it wrought, I must confess, an opposite revenge. Then Dolly became in my eyes a treasure more desirable than ever, now my chance of gaining her seemed shaken. I thought of all her tender moods and pretty ways, so that my eyes filled with tears. I had behaved rudely, had shocked her gentle sense of decorum. And here, by reason of an exaggerated spleen, had I thrown her alone into the company of the very man whose influence over her I most dreaded.

And what would Duke say—Duke, who in noble abrogation of his own claims had so pathetically com-

mitted to my care this child of his deep unselfish love?

I had been walking rapidly in the opposite direction to that I fancied the other two would take; and now I stopped and faced about, scared with a sudden shock of remorse.

What a fool, a coward, a traitor to my trust I had been! I must retrace my steps at once and seek them up and down the forest alleys. I started off in panic haste, sweating with the terror of what I had done. I plunged presently into the woods, and for a couple of hours hurried hither and thither without meeting them.

By and by, breaking into the open again, I came upon an inn, favored of tourists, that stood back from a road. I was parched and exhausted, and thought a glass of beer would revive me to a fresh start. Walking into the tap I passed by the open door of the coffee-room, and there inside were they seated at a table together, and a waiter was uncorking a bottle of champagne behind them.

Why didn't I go in then and there? I had found my quarry and the game might yet be mine. Ask the stricken lover who will pursue his lady hotly through anxious hours and then, when he sees her at last, will saunter carelessly by as if his heart were cold to her attractions. Some such motive, in a form infinitely baser, was mine. I may call it pride, and hear the wheel creak out a sardonic laugh.

"They seem happy enough without me," my heart said, but my conscience knew the selfishness that must nurse an injury above any sore need of the injurer.

Their voices came to me happy and merry. They had not seen me. I drank my beer and stole outside miserably temporizing with my duty.

"She sha'n't escape again," I thought; "I'll go a little distance off and watch."

I waited long, but they never came. At length, stung to desperation, I strode back to the inn and straight into the coffee-room. It was empty. Seeing a waiter, I asked him if the lady and gentleman who had lunched at such a table had left.

"Yes," he said. He believed the lady and gentleman had gone into the forest by the garden way.

Then I was baffled again. Surely the curse of the virago of the morning was operating after all.

Evening drew on, and at last there was no help for it but to make for the station and catch our usual train back to town.

They were standing on the platform when I reached it. I walked straight up to them. Dolly flushed crimson when she saw me and then went pale as a windflower, but she never spoke a word.

"Hullo!" said Jason. "The wanderer returned. We've had a rare day of it; and you have, too, no doubt."

I spoke steadily, with a set determination to prove master of myself.

"I've been looking for you all day. Dolly, I'm sorry I left you in a temper. Please forgive me, dear."

"Oh, yes," she said, indifferently and weariedly. "It doesn't matter."

"But it does matter to me, Dolly, very much, to keep your good opinion."

She turned and looked at me with a strange expression, as if she were on the point of bursting into tears, but she only ended with a little formless laugh and looked away again.

"I don't think you can value my good opinion much, and I'm sure I don't know why you should."

The train lunging in at this point stopped our further talk; and, once seated in it, the girl lay back in her corner with closed eyes as if asleep.

Jason sat silent, with folded arms, the lamplight below the shadow cast by his hat brim emphasizing the smile on his firmly curved lips; and I, for my part, sat silent also, for my heart seemed sick unto death.

At the terminus Dolly would have no further escort home. She was tired out, she said, and begged only we would see her into an omnibus and go our ways without her.

As the vehicle lumbered off I turned fiercely upon my brother.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LETTER AND AN ANSWER.

"You dog!" I said, in a low, stern voice; "tell me the meaning of this."

He gave a little, mocking, airy laugh and, thrusting his hands into his pockets, wheeled round upon me.

"What's your question?" said he.

"You know. What have you said to the girl to make her treat me like this?"

He raised his eyebrows in assumed perplexity.

"Really," he said, "you go a long way to seek. What have I said? How have you behaved, you mean."

"You lie—I don't! I know her, that's enough. If you have told her my story——"

"If?" he repeated, coolly.

"I may add a last chapter to it, in which you'll figure—that's all."

He was a little startled, I could see, but retained his sang froid, with an effort.

"You jump too much to conclusion, my good fellow. I have said nothing to her about your little affair with Modred as yet."

"That means you intend to hold it over my head as a menace where she is concerned. I know you."

"Then you know a very charming fellow. Why, what a dolt you are! Here's a pothee because I play cavalier to a girl whom you throw over in a fit of sulks. I couldn't do less in common decency."

"Take care that you do no more. I'm not the only one to reckon with in this business."

"A fig for that!" he cried, snapping his fingers. "I'm not to be coerced into taking second place if I have a fancy for first."

"I warn you; that's enough. For the rest, let's understand one another. I'll have no more of this sham for

convention's sake. We're enemies, and we'll be known for enemies. My door's shut to you. Keep out of my way and think twice before you make me desperate."

With that I turned and strode from him. His mocking laugh came after me again, but I took no notice of it.

Should I tell Duke all? I shrunk from the mere thought. A coward even then, I dared not confess to him how I had betrayed my trust; what fearful suspicions of the nature of my failure lay dark on my heart. No—I must see Dolly first and force my sentence from her lips.

He put down the book he was reading from, as I entered the sitting-room.

"Well," he said, cheerily, "what success?"

I sat away from him, beyond the radiance of the lamp, and affected to be busy unlacing my boots.

"I can't say as yet, Duke. Do you mind postponing the question for a day or two?"

"Of course, if you wish it." I felt the surprise in his tone. "Mayn't I ask why?"

"Not now, old fellow. I missed my opportunity, that's all."

"Is anything wrong, Renny?"

"Not all right, at least."

"Renny, why shouldn't it be? I can't be mistaken as to the direction of her feelings—by my soul, I can't."

"I'm not so sure," I said, in a voice of great distress.

He recognized it and stopped questioning me at once.

"You want to be alone, I see," said he, gently. "Well, I'll be off."

As he passed me, he placed his hand for a moment on my shoulder. The action was tender and sympathetic, but I shrunk under it as if it had been a blow.

When the door had closed upon him I rose and sat down at the table. I wrote:

"Dear Dolly: I made a fool of myself to-day and have repented it ever since in sackcloth and ashes. I had so wished to be alone with you, dear, and it made me mad that he should come between us. He isn't a good companion for you. I must say it, though he is my brother. Had I thought

him so I should have brought him to see you before. I only say this to explain my anger at his appearance, and now I will drop the subject for another, which is the real reason of my writing. I had hoped, so much, dear, to put it to you personally, there in the old forest that we have spent so many happy hours in, but I missed my opportunity and now I am in too much of a fever to wait another week. Dolly, will you be my wife? I can afford a home of my own now, and I shall be glad and grateful if you will consent to become mistress of it. I feel that written words can only sound cold at best; so I will say nothing more here, but just this—if you will have me, I will strive in all things to be your loving and devoted husband.

"RENALT TRENDER."

All in a glow of confident tenderness, inspired by the words I had written, I added the address and went out and posted my little missive. Its mere composition, the fact of its now lying in the postbox, a link between us, gave me a chastened sense of relief and satisfaction that was restorative to my injured vanity. The mistake of the morning was reacted upon in time, and I felt that nothing short of a disruption of natural affinities could interfere to keep back the inevitable answer. So assured was I, indeed, that I allowed my thoughts to wander as if for a last farewell, into regions wherein the simple heart of my present could find no way to enter. "Good-by, Zyp," the voiceless soul of me muttered.

That night, looking at Duke's dark head at rest on the pillow, I thought: "It will be put right to-morrow or the next day, and you, dear friend, need never know what might have followed on my abuse of your trust." Then I slept peacefully, but my dreams were all of Zyp—not of the other.

The next day, at the office, I was careful to keep altogether out of Dolly's way. Indeed, my work taking me elsewhere, I never once saw her and went home in the evening unenlightened by a single glance from her gray eyes. This, the better policy, I thought, would save us both embarrassment and the annoyance of any curiosity on the part of her fellow-workers, who would surely be quick to detect a romantic state of affairs between us.

Nevertheless, despite my self-confidence, I awaited that

evening in some trepidation the answer that was to decide the direction of my future.

We were sitting at supper when it came, held by one corner in her apron by our landlady, and my face went pale as I saw the schoolgirl superscription.

"From Dolly?" murmured Duke.

I nodded and broke the seal. My hands trembled and a mist was before my eyes. It ran as follows:

"Dear Renny: Thank you very, very much for your kind offer, but I can't accept it. I thought I had so much to say, and this is all I can think of. I hope it won't hurt you. It can't, I know, for long, because now I see I was never really the first in your heart; and your letter don't sound as if you will find it very difficult to get over. Please forgive me if I'm wrong, but anyhow it's too late now. I might have once, but I can't now, Renny. I think perhaps I became a woman all in a moment yesterday. Please don't write or say a word to me again about this, for I mean it really and truly. Your affectionate friend,
DOLLY MELLISON."

"P. S.—It was a little unfair of you, I must say, not to tell me about that Zyp."

I sat and returned the letter to its folds quite coolly and calmly. If there was fire in me, I kept it under then.

"Duke," I said, quietly, "she has refused me."

He struggled up from his chair. His face was all amazement and his voice hoarse.

"Refused you? What have you said? What have you done? Something has happened, I tell you."

"Why? She was at perfect liberty to make her own choice."

"You wrote to her last night?"

"Yes."

"Why did you? Why didn't you do as I understood you intended to yesterday?"

"I asked you to leave that question alone for the present."

"You've no right to. I——" his face flamed up for a moment. But with a mighty effort he fought it under.

"Renny," he said, in a subdued voice, "I had no business to speak to you like that. But you don't know upon

what a wheel of torment I have been these last weeks. The girl—Dolly—is so much to me, and her happiness —” he broke off almost with a sob.

I sprung to my feet. I could bear it no longer.

“Think what you like of me!” I cried. “I have made a muddle of the whole business—a wretched, unhappy muddle. But I suffer, too, Duke. I never knew what Miss—Miss Mellison was to me till now, when I have lost her.”

“I don’t ask to see her letter. You haven’t misread it by any possibility?”

“No—it’s perfectly clear. She refuses me and holds out no hope.”

He set his frowning brows and fell into a gloomy silence. He took no notice of me even when I told him that I must go into the open air for awhile to walk and try to find surcease of my racking trouble.

“Now,” I thought, when I got outside, “for the villainous truth. To strike at me like that! It was worthy of him—worthy of him. And I am to blame for leaving them together—I, who pretended to an affection for the girl and was ready to swear to love and protect her forevermore. What a pitiful rag of manliness! What courage that daren’t even now tell the truth to my friend up there! Friend? He’s done with me, I expect. But for the other. He didn’t give her my history—not he. Perhaps he didn’t as I meant it, but I never dreamed that he would play upon that second stop for his devils of hate to dance to; I never even thought of it. What a hideous fool I have been! Oh, Jason, my brother, if it had only been you instead of Modred!”

I jerked to a stop. Some formless thoughts had been in my mind to hurry on into the presence of the villain who had dealt me such a coward blow, and to drive his slander in one red crash down his throat. Now, in an instant, it broke upon me that I had no knowledge of where he lived—that by my own act I had yesterday cut off all communication between us. Perhaps, though, in his cobra-like dogging of me he would be driven before long to seek me out again of his own accord, that

he might gloat over the havoc he had occasioned. I must bide my time as patiently as I could on the chance.

Late at night I returned and lay down upon the sofa in the sitting-room. I felt unclean for Duke's company and would not go up to him. Let me do myself justice. It was not all dread of his anger that kept me from him. There was a most lost, sorrowful feeling in me at having thus requited all his friendship and his generosity.

As I lay and writhed in sickly thought, my eye was attracted by the glimmering of some white object set prominently on the mantelpiece. I rose and found it was a letter addressed to me in his handwriting. Foreseeing its contents I tore it open and read:

"I think it best that our partnership should cease and I find lodging elsewhere. You will understand my reasons. Dolly comes first with me, that's all. It may have been your error; I can't think it was your willful fault; but that she would have refused you without some good reason I can't believe. Your manner seems to point to the suspicion that somehow her happiness is threatened. I may be wrong, but I intend to set myself to find out; and until some explanation is forthcoming, I think it best that we should live apart. I shall call here to-morrow during the dinner hour and arrange about having my things moved and settle matters as far as I am concerned. Your friend,
DUKE STRAW."

I stood long with the letter in my hand.

"Well, its best," I muttered at last, "and I thought he would do it. He's my friend still, thank heaven, for he says so. But, oh, Jason, your debt is accumulating!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

LOST.

The week that followed was a sad and lonely one to me. My romance was ended—my friend parted from me—my heart ever wincing under the torture of self-reproach.

As to the first, it would seem that I should have no great reason for insuperable regret. The situation had been made for, not by me; I was free to let my thoughts revert unhampered to the object of my first and only true love.

That was all so; yet I know I brooded over my loss for the time being, as if it were the greatest that could have befallen me. Such is human inconsistency. So he who, vainly seeking some large reward, condescends half-disdainfully to a smaller, is altogether disproportionately vexed if the latter is unexpectedly denied him.

I went about my work in a hopeless, mechanical manner that only scarcely concealed the bitter ache my heart endured. Occasionally, at rare intervals, I came across Dolly, but formally only and never to exchange a word. Furtively glancing at her when this happened, I noticed that she looked pale, and, I thought, not happy, but this may have been nothing but fancy, for my hasty view was generally limited to half-profile. Of me she took no heed, desiring, apparently, the absolute close of our old intercourse, and mere pride precluded me from making any further effort toward an explanation.

Would that even then I had been wise or noble enough to force the barrier of reserve. God knows but I might have been in time to save her. Yet maybe my attitude was not altogether unjustified. To put me on the footing of a formal stranger was heavy punishment for a fault committed under motives that were anything, at least, but base.

With Duke my intercourse was confined to the office and to matters of business. He showed no unfriendly spirit toward me there and no desire for a resumption of our old terms. He never, in public or private, touched upon the subject that was nearest both our hearts, or alluded to it in any way. If I was conscious of any melancholy shadow towering between us it was not because he sought to lend to its features the gloom that must be enwrapping his own soul.

At last the week ended, and the silence, that had lain black and ominous as a snake along it, was awakened

and reared itself, poisonous for a spring. Yet its voice spoke up musical at first.

It was Saturday afternoon, and I was walking home toward my lodgings in a very depressed frame of mind, when a step came behind me and Duke fell into step alongside.

"Renny," he said, "I think it right to tell you. I have taken the privilege of an old friend and spoken to Dolly on a certain subject."

I nodded. The mere fact was a relief to me.

"We could only exchange a few words, but she has promised to come out with me to-morrow; and then, I hope, I shall learn more. What time will you be at home?"

I told him all day, if there was a chance of his turning up.

"Very well," he said; "then I will call in upon you some time or other. Good-by."

He seemed to be on the point of going, but to alter his mind, and he suddenly took my hand and pressed it hard.

"Are you lonely, old fellow?"

"Very, Duke—and I deserve to be."

"It's for the best? You agree with me?"

"Quite."

He looked sorrowfully in my face, wrung my hand a second time and walked off rapidly.

It was the expression of his I ever after remembered with most pathetic heart-sickness and love. I never saw it in his eyes again—never again.

I rose upon the Sunday morning restless still and unrefreshed. An undefinable feeling of ominous expectancy would not let me sit quiet or read or do anything but lend my mind to extravagant speculations and pace the room up and down in nervous irritability.

At last, thoroughly tired out, I threw myself into an easy-chair and dozed off from sheer exhaustion. I could not have slept many minutes, when a clap in my ears awoke me. It might have been an explosive burst of

thunder, so loudly it slammed upon my senses. Yet it was nothing more than the closing of the room door.

Then I struggled to my feet, for Duke stood before me, and I saw that his face was white and menacing as death's own.

"Get up!" he cried, in a harsh, stern voice. "I want to ask you something."

I faced him and my heart seemed to suddenly swerve down with a sickly sensation.

"What is it?" I muttered.

"She's gone—that's all!"

"Gone?"

"She never met me this morning as she promised. I waited an hour—more. Then I grew frightened and went to her lodgings. She had left the evening before, saying she wasn't coming back. A man came to fetch her and she went away with him. Do you understand?—with him!"

"With whom?" I asked, in a confused, reeling manner; yet I knew.

"I want you to tell me."

"How can I, Duke?"

"I want you to say what you have done with your trust? There has been something going on of late—some secret kept from me. Where is that brother of yours?"

"I know no more than you do."

"I shall find out before long. The cunning doesn't exist that could keep him hidden from me if—if he is a party to this. Why are you silent? I can read it in your eyes. They have met, and it must have been through you."

"Before God, it wasn't!"

"Then they have!" He put his hand to his face and staggered as if he had been struck there.

"Oh!" he gasped; "the horror of what I dreaded!"

Then he came closer and snarled at me:

"Here's a friend, out of all the world! So patronizing to accept the poor little treasure of my life and soul, and

so royal to roll it in the mud! Was this a put-up affair between you?"

"You are hateful and unjust!" I cried, stung beyond endurance. "He forced himself upon us last Sunday. I was brutal, almost, in my efforts to get rid of him. But for some reason or other, Dolly—Miss Mellison—took his side. When I found so, I left them in a huff and repented almost immediately. But, though I sought far and near, I never came across them again till evening."

He listened with a black, gloomy impatience.

"You acted well, by your own confession," said he. "You played the part of a true friend and lover by leaving her alone for a moment only in the company of that paragon."

"I oughtn't to, I know."

He gave a high, grating laugh.

"But, putting me on one side," I began, when he took me up with the most intense acrid bitterness.

"Why can't I, indeed—you and all your precious kith and kin? Why did I ever save you from being knocked on the head in that thieves' garden? I was happy before—God knows I might have been happy in another way now. You've proved the viper on my hearth with a vengeance. Put you on one side? Ah, I dare say that would suit you well—to shirk the responsibility of your own act and leave the suffering to others."

"I have suffered, Duke, and always shall. I won't gainsay you—but this hurts me perhaps only one degree less than it does you. Why put the worst construction on it?"

He gave another cruel laugh.

"Let's have your theory of her vanishing without a word to me," he said.

"At least you can't be certain that it—it was my brother."

"How perspicacious of you! You don't think so yourself, do you? Or that I should have meekly accepted that woman's statement without some inquiry as to the appearance of the interesting stranger?"

He dropped his cruelly bantering manner for one hard as iron and ferocious.

"Let's stop this double-faced foolery. I want his address of you."

"I haven't got it, you know."

"You can't guess at it?"

"Not possibly. What would you do if you had it?"

"What do you think? Call and offer my congratulations, of course."

"Don't be a madman. You know nothing for certain. Wait and see if she doesn't turn up at the office as usual to-morrow."

He seemed to think a moment, and then he threw up his hands with a loud, wailing moan.

"Lost!" he cried. "In my heart I know it."

Did I not in mine? It had rung in my ears all night. I took a step toward him, greatly moved by his despairing, broken tone, but he waved me back fiercely.

"I curse the day," he cried in bitter grief, "that ever I came across you. I would have let you rob me—that was nothing to her happiness; but now——"

"Let him look to himself," he went on after a pause, in which he had mastered his emotion. "After to-morrow—I will wait till then—but afterward—the world isn't wide enough to keep us apart. Better for him to run from an uncubbed tigress than this twisted cripple!"

He tossed one arm aloft with a wild, savage gesture and strode heavily from the room.

CHAPTER XXV.

A LAST MESSAGE.

Dolly never came to work the next morning, but there arrived a little letter from her to Mr. Ripley, giving notice, that was all, with no address or clew to her whereabouts, and an intimation that it was understood she sacrificed her position—pitiful heaven, for what?

My employer tossed the note to me indifferently, asking me to see about the engagement of a fresh hand, if necessary. He little guessed what those few simple words meant to two of his staff, or foresaw the tragedy to which they were the prelude.

When the dinner hour came I followed Duke out and put the scrap of paper into his hand without a word. He was not unprepared for it, for he already knew, of course, that his worst apprehensions were realized by the non-appearance of the girl at her usual place in the office.

He read it in silence, and in silence handed it back to me. His face in twenty-four hours seemed to have grown to be the face of an old man. All its once half-sad, half-humorous thoughtfulness was set into a single hard expression of some dark resolve.

"Well," he said, suddenly, stopping in his walk and facing me, for I still kept pace with him.

"What do you intend doing, Duke?"

"I have one mission in life, Mr. Trender. Good-afternoon to you."

I fell back and watched him go from me. Maimed as I was myself, how could I in any way help him to cure his crueler hurt?

But now began a curious somber struggle of cross purposes. To find out where Jason had sunk his burrow and hidden the spoils of his ugly false sport—there we worked in harness. It was only when the quarry should be run down that we must necessarily disagree as to the terms of its disposition.

For myself: A new despairing trouble had been woven into my life by the hand that had already wrought me such evil. Its very touch had, however, made wreck of an impression that had been in a certain sense an embarrassment, and my movements became in consequence less trammelled. Let me explain more definitely, if indeed I can do so and not appear heartless.

Dolly, innocent, bewitching and desirable, had so confused my moral ideas as to imbue them with a certain sweet sophistry of love that half-deceived me into a belief in its fundamental soundness. That was done with.

Dolly dethroned, earthly, enamored of a brazen idol could be no rival to Zyp. My heart might yearn to her with pity and a deep remorse that it was I who had been the weak, responsible minister of her perversion, but the old feeling was dead, never to be revived. I longed to find her; to rescue her from the black gulf into which I feared she had leaped; to face the villain who had bruised her heart and wrench atonement from him by the throat, as it were. Not less it was my duty to warn him; stand between him, worthless as he was, and the deadly pursuit alert for his destruction.

For Duke: I must judge him as he revealed himself to me, and baffle, if possible, the terrible spirit of what I dared not name to myself. Think only that at one wicked blow he was deprived of that whole structure of gentle romance that had saved his moral life from starvation!

Therefore it was that during the after hours of work I became for long a restless, flitting ghost haunted by a ghost. By street and rail and river, aimless apparently, but with one object through all, we went wandering through the dark mazes of the night and of the city, always hoping to light upon that we sought and always baffled. Theaters, restaurants, music halls, night shows and exhibitions of every description—any place that was calculated to attract in the least a nature responsive to the foppery of glitter or an appeal to the senses—we visited and explored, without result. Gambling dens—such as we could obtain the entree to—were a persistent lodestone to our restlessness; and here, especially, was I often conscious of that shadow of a shade—that dark ghost of my own phantom footsteps—standing silent at my elbow and watching—watching for him who never came.

Whithersoever we went the spur of the moment's qualm goaded us. Any little experience, any chance allusion, was sufficient to suggest a possibility in the matter of the tendency of a lost and degenerate soul. Now we foregathered on the skirt of some fulsome and braying street preacher's band; now suffered in a music hall under the

skittish vapidity of a "lion comique"; now, perhaps, humbled our hot and weary pride in the luminous twilight of some old walled-in church, where evening service brought a few worshipers together.

I say "we," yet in all this we acted independently. Only, whether in company or apart, the spirit of one common motive linked us together, and that so that I, at least, never felt alone.

So the weeks drew into months and Dolly herself was a phantom to my memory. By day the mechanism of our lives moved in the accustomed grooves; by night we were wandering birds of passage flitting dismally over waste places. More than once on a Sunday had I taken train to Epping, driven by the thought that some half-forgotten sentiment might by chance move other than me to the scene of old pleasant experiences. But she never came. Her "seasick weary bark" was nearing the rocks, and the breakers of eternity were already sounding in her ears.

Why postpone the inevitable or delay longer over description of that pointless pursuit that was to end only in catastrophe and death?

Christmas had come and gone with me—a mockery of good will and cheer—and a bitter January set in. That month the very demon of the east wind flew uncontrolled, and his steely sting was of a length and shrewdness to pierce thickest cloth and coverlet, frame and lung and heart itself.

One evening I had swallowed my supper and was preparing for my nightly prow. Duke had remained at the office overtime, and my tramp was like to be unhaunted of its familiar. I had actually blown out the lamp, when his rapid footstep—I knew it well—came up the stairs, and in a moment the door was thrown open with a crash and I heard him breathing in the room.

"He's gone!" he ejaculated in a quick, panting voice.

"No; I'm here, Duke!"

"My God! Renny—do you hear? Come—come at once. No—light the lamp; I've something to show you."

I struck a match, with shaking hand, and put it to the wick. As the dull flame sputtered and rose I turned and looked at my friend. The expression of his face I shall never forget till I die. It was bloodless—spectral—inhuman; the face of one to whom a great dread had been realized—a last hope denied.

He held out to me a little soiled and crumpled sheet of paper. I took it, with a spasm of the heart and breath that seemed to suffocate me. My eyes turned from and were fascinated by it at once.

"You had better read," he said. "It's the last chapter of your own pretty romance. Make haste—I want to get to business."

It was from her, as I had foreseen—a few sad words to the old good friend who had so loved and protected her:

"I must let you know before I go to die. I couldn't meet you that morning—what a time ago it seems! He wouldn't let me, though I cried and begged him to. I don't know now what made me do it all; how he upset my faith in Renny and turned my love to himself in a moment. I think he has a dreadful influence that made me follow him and obey him. It doesn't matter now. I went to him, that's enough; and he's broken my heart. Please ask Renny to forgive me. Perhaps if he had had a little more patience with me I might have acted different—but I can't be certain even of that. I'm going to kill myself, Duke, dear, and before I do it I just want to say this: I know now you loved poor Dolly all the time. How I know it I don't understand, but somehow it's quite clear. Oh, what have I thrown away, when I might have been so happy! You were always good to me, and I thank you with my last breath. Don't hurt him, Duke; I don't think he understands the difference to me. But he always promised to be a faithful lover—and yesterday I found that he's married already. That's why I'm going to do it."

The paper dropped from my hand. Duke picked it up with an evil laugh and thrust it into his breast pocket.

"Married!" I muttered.

"Oh!" he cried; "it's all one for that! That's a family matter. The question here goes beyond—into the heart of this—this death warrant."

He struck savagely where the letter lay and stood staring at me with gloating eyes.

"Duke—are you going to murder him?"

"I'm going to find her. Let that do for the present—and you've got to help me."

"Where are we to look? Did the letter give an address?"

"No. She kept her secret to the last. It was a noble one, I swear. There's a postmark, though, and that's my clew. Hurry, will you?"

I seized my hat and stick.

"Duke—for the love of heaven, why must it be too late even now?"

"Because I know it is. Doesn't that satisfy you? I loved her—do you understand it now for the first time? The fiend tread on your heels. Aren't you ever coming?"

I hurried after him into the street. A clap of wind struck and staggered us as if it had been water. Beating through the night, its icy fury clutched at us, stinging and buffeting our faces, until it seemed as though we were fighting through an endless thicket of brambles. Struggling and panting onward—silent with the silence of the lost—we made our way by slow degrees to the low ground about Chelsea, and presently came out into a freer air and the black vision of the river sliding before us from night into night.

"Duke," I whispered, awfully—"is this what you fear?"

"Follow!" he cried. "I fear nothing! It's past that!"

By lowering factory and grimy wall; by squalid streets peeled of uncleanness in the teeth of the bitter blast; by low-browed taverns, that gushed red on us a moment and were gone, he sped with crooked paces, and I followed.

Then he stopped so suddenly that I almost stumbled against him, and we were standing at the mouth of a shadowy court, and overhead a hiccougging gas jet made a gibbering terror of his white face.

"Where are we?" I said, and he answered:

"Where we naturally take up the clew—outside a police station."

CHAPTER XXVI.

FROM THE DEPTHS.

Into a dull, gusty room, barren of everything but the necessities of its office, we walked and stopped.

Distempered walls; a high desk, a railed dock, where creatures were put to the first question like an experimental torture; black windows high in the wall and barred with network of wire, as if to break into fragments the sunshine of hope; a double gas bracket on an arm hanging from the ceiling, grimly suggestive of a gallows; a fireplace whose warmth was ruthlessly boxed in—such was the place we found ourselves in. Its ministers figured in the persons of a half-dozen constables sitting officially yawning on benches against the walls, and looking perplexingly human shorn of their helmets; and in the presence of a high priest, or inspector, and his clerk who sat respectively at the desk and a table placed alongside of it.

The latter rose upon our entrance and asked our business.

"It's plain enough," said Duke. "I have received, by post, an hour ago, a letter from a young woman threatening suicide. I don't know her address, but the postmark is this district."

The officer motioned us to the higher authority at the desk.

"May I see it?" said the latter.

My companion produced the letter and handed it over. Throughout his bearing and behavior were completely collected and formal—passionless altogether in their studied unemotionalism.

The inspector went through the poor little scrawl attentively from first word to last. No doubt he was a kindly family man in private. Officially these pitiful war-

rants of heartbreaks were mere items in his day's business.

When he had finished he raised his eyes, but not his head.

"Sweetheart?" he said.

"No," answered Duke, "but an old friend."

"Renny?" asked the inspector, pointing a pen at me.

"Yes."

"She ran away?"

"Yes."

"Who with?"

"This man's brother."

"How long ago?"

"Three months, about."

"And you have never seen her since?"

"No."

"Nor him?"

"No."

"And don't know where they lived?"

"No—or I shouldn't be here."

The inspector caressed his short red beard, looked thoughtfully again at the letter a moment or two, placed it gently on the desk and leaned forward.

"You'd better take a man and hunt up the waterside. She hasn't come ashore here."

"You think she means it?"

"I think—yes; you'd better go and look."

"By water, I mean?"

"Yes—by water. That's my opinion."

He called to one of the seated men and gave him certain directions. A minute later we were all three in the street outside.

What happened or whither we went during that long night remains only in my memory the ghastly shadow of a dream. I can recall the white plate of the moon, and still the icy wind and the spectral march onward. This seemed the fitting outcome of our monotonous weeks of wandering—this aimless corpse-search on the part of two passionate fools who had failed in their pursuit of the living woman. To my sick fancy it seemed the mon-

strous parody of chase—an objectless struggle toward a goal that shifted with every step toward any determined point.

Still we never stopped, but flitted hopelessly from station to station, only to find ourselves baffled and urged forward afresh. I became familiar with rooms such as that we had left—rooms varying slightly in detail, but all furnished to the same pattern. Grewsomer places knew us, too—hideous cellars for the dead, where clothes were lifted from stiff yellow faces and from limbs stuck out in distorted burlesque of the rest that is called everlasting.

Once, I remember, it came upon us with a quivering shock that our mission was fulfilled; a body had been brought in—I forget where—the body of a young woman. But when we came to view it it was not that that we sought.

Pitiful heaven, was our tragedy, then, but a common fashion of the dreadful waterway we groped our passage along? How was it possible in all that harvest of death to find the one awn for our particular gleanings?

But here—though I was little conscious of it at the time—an impression took life in me that was to bear strange fruit by and by.

Dawn was in the air, menacing, most chill and gloomy, when we came out once more upon the riverside at a point where an old rotting bridge of timber sprawled across the stream like a wrecked dam. All its neighborhood seemed waste ground or lonely deserted tenements standing black and crookedly against a wan sweep of sky.

In the moment of our issuing, as if it were a smaller splinter detached from the wreck, a little boat glided out from under the bridge and made for a flight of dank and spongy steps that led up from the water not ten yards from where we stood.

Something in the action of the dim figure that pulled, or the other that hung over the stern sheets of the phantom craft, moved our unwearying guide to motion us with his arm to watchfulness and an immediate pause.

In the same instant he hollowed his hand to his mouth and hailed:

"Any luck, mate?"

The man who was rowing slowed down at once and paddled gingerly to within a few yards of the steps.

"Who be you?" he growled, like a dog.

Our friend gave his authority.

"Oh," said the fellow. "Yes; we've found one."

"What sex, my man?"

"Gurl!"

I could have cried out. Something found my heart and seized it in a suffocating grip.

"Where was it?"

"Caught yonder in the timbers."

I reeled and clutched at Duke, but he shook me off sternly. I knew as surely as that the night was done with that here our search ended.

That I stood quaking and shivering as nerveless as a haunted drunkard; that I dared not follow them when they moved to the steps; that Duke's face was set like a dying man's as he walked stiffly from me and stood looking down upon the boat with a dreadful smile—all this comes to me from the grim shadows of the past. Then I only knew a huddled group—a weighted chamber of shapes with something heavy and sodden swung among them—a pause of hours—of years—of a lifetime—and suddenly a hideous scream that cleft like a madman's into the waste silence of the dawn.

He was down upon his knees by it—groveling, moaning—tearing tufts of dead wintry grass with his hands in ecstasy of pain—tossing his wild arms to the sky in impotent agony of search for some least grain of hope or comfort.

I hurried to him; I called upon his name and hers. I saw the sweet white face lying like a stone among the grass.

Wiser than I, the accustomed ministers of scenes such as this stood watchful by and waited for the fit to pass. When its fury was spent, they quietly took up their burden once more and moved away.

I had no need then to bid my comrade command himself. He rose on the instant from the ground, where he had lain writhing, and fiercely rejecting all offer of assistance on my part, followed in the wake of the ghastly procession.

They bore it to the nearest station and there claimed their reward. Think of it! We, who would have given our all to save the living woman, were outbidden by these carrion crows who staked upon the dead!

Again at this point a lapse comes into my memory. Out of it grows a figure, that of Duke, that stands before me and speaks with the horrible smile again on its lips.

"You had better go home," it says.

"Duke—why? What comes next? What are you going to do?"

"What does it matter? You had better go home."

"I must know. Was there anything upon the—upon the body? Duke—was there?"

"There was a letter."

"Who from?"

"Go home, I tell you."

"I can't—I won't—I must save you from yourself! I—Duke——"

He strikes at me—hits me, so that I stagger back—and, with an oath, he speeds from me and is gone.

I recover myself and am on the point of giving mad chase, when a thought strikes me and I rush into the building I have been all this time standing outside the door of.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

Tearing up the steps, I almost fell into the arms of our guide of the long, hideous night.

"Can I see it?" I cried.

"Steady, sir," he said, staying and supporting me with a hand. "What's up now?"

"I want to see it—there was a letter—I——"

"All property found on the body is took possession of."

"He saw it, I tell you."

"Your friend, there? So he did—but he gave it over."

"I'll give it over. I don't want to keep it, man. There was an address on it—there must have been, I swear; and if you don't let me know it, there'll be murder—do you understand?—murder!"

No doubt he did understand. In such matters a policeman's mind is intuitive.

"Come along, then," he said; "I'll see what can be done," and, holding me along the elbow in the professional manner, he led me through the building to a sort of outhouse that stood in a gloomy yard to the rear.

Pushing open a door, he bid me enter and wait while he went and communicated with the inspector.

The room I found myself in was like nothing so much as a ghastly species of scullery; built with a formal view to cleanliness and ventilation. All down its middle ran a long zinc-covered table, troughed slightly at the side and sloping gently like a fishmonger's slab. Its purpose was evident in the drenched form that lay on it covered with a cloth.

And to this sordid pass had come she, the loving and playful, with whom I had wandered a few short weeks ago among the green glades of the old forest. Now more than the solemnity of death pronounced us apart.

I shivered and drew back, and then was aware of a man washing his hands at a sink that stood to one end of the room.

He turned his head as he washed and looked at me.

"Now, my man, what is it?" he said.

He was lean, formal-faced and spectacled—a doctor by every uninviting sign of the profession.

I told him my business and referred shrinkingly to the thing lying hidden there.

"There isn't, I suppose, any—any hope whatever?"

"Oh, dear, no; not the least."

He came toward me pruning and trimming his cold finger-nails.

"She has been in the water, I should say, quite eight hours, or possibly nine."

He pulled the cloth down slightly, with a speculative motion of his hand, so as to expose the white, rigid face. I had no time to stop him before its sightless eyes were looking up at me.

"Oh, Dolly! Dolly! Such a fearful little woman, and yet with the courage to bring yourself to this!"

Suddenly, through the heart of my wild pity pierced a thought that had already once before stirred unrecognized in me.

"Doctor," I said, staring down on the poor lifeless face, "do the drowned always look like that?"

"Certainly they do, more or less."

"But how more? Is it possible, for instance, for a person to half-drown and then seemingly recover; to be put to bed nearly himself again, and yet be found dead in the morning?"

"How can I say? In such a case there must be gross carelessness or quite unexpected complications."

"But if I tell you I once heard of this happening—was witness, indeed, of the fact?"

The doctor lifted his shoulder, adjusted his spectacles and shrugged himself with an awkward posture of skepticism.

"How did he look?" he said.

"Dreadful—swollen, horribly distorted. His face was black—his hands clenched. He seemed to have died in great pain."

He gave a little scornful sniff.

"Do you want my opinion on that?" he cried. "Well—here it is: It was a case for the police. No drowned man ever looked after that fashion."

"Then you think he must have come to his death by other means, and after he was put to bed?"

"I haven't the least doubt about it whatsoever, if it was all as you say."

I gave a thin, sudden cry. I couldn't help it—it was forced from me. Then, of my own act, I pulled the cloth

once more over the dead face. It had spoken to me in such a manner as its love had never expressed in life.

"You have vindicated me, my sweetheart of the old days," I murmured. "Good-by, Dolly, till I may witness your love that is undying in another world."

I think the doctor fancied that the trouble of the night had turned my brain. What did it matter what he thought—what anybody thought now? I stood acquitted at the bar of my own conscience. In my first knowledge of that stupendous relief I could find no place for one other sentiment but crazy gratitude.

As I stood, half-stunned in the shock of emotion, the officer I awaited entered the room bearing in his hand a slip of paper.

"The letter's detained," he said, "but this here's the address it's wrote from, and you'd better act upon it without delay."

With a tremendous effort I swept together my scattered faculties and took it from him.

It was not much information that the paper contained—an address only from a certain "Nelson terrace" in Battersea—but such as it was I held it in common with Duke, whose sole advantage was a brief start of me.

Calling back my thanks to the friendly constable, I hurried into the street and so off and away in wild pursuit.

Still as I ran a phantom voice went with me, crying: "You did not kill him—your brother Modred."

The rapture of it kept time to my hurrying footsteps; it flew over and with me, like the albatross of hope, and brought the breeze of a healthful promise on its wings; it spoke from the faces of people I passed, as if they wished me to know as I swept by that I was no longer in their eyes a man of blood.

"You did not kill him!" it sung in my brain—"you did not kill him—you did not kill him"—then all in a moment, with a dying shock: "Who did?"

I stopped, as if I had run against a wall. I swear, till then no shadowy thought of this side of the question had darkened my heart in passing.

Still, impelled to an awful haste, I beat the whole horror resolutely to one side and rushed on my way. "Presently—presently," I muttered, "I will sit down and rest and think it over from beginning to end."

By that time I was in a street of ugly cockney houses stretching monotonously on either side. I was speeding down it, seeking its name, and convinced from my inquiries that I could not be far from my destination, when something standing crouched against a low front garden wall, where it met the angle of a tall brick gate post, caught the tail of my eye and stopped me with a jerk. It was Duke, and I had run him down.

He spat a curse from his drawn, white lips, as I faced him, and bade me begone as I valued my life.

"Duke," I panted, watchful of him, "I do value it now—never mind why. I value it far above his you have come to take. But he is my brother—and you were once my friend."

"No longer—I swear it," he cried, blazing out on me dreadfully. "Will you go while there's time?"

Then he assumed a mockery more bitter than his rage.

"Harkee!" he whispered. "This isn't the place. I came here to be out of the way and rest. I'll go home by and by."

"Will you come with me now?"

"With you? Haven't I had enough of you Trenders? I put it to you as a reasonable man."

As he spoke the wail of a young child came through the window of an upper room of the house adjoining. At the sound he seized my wrists in one of his hands with the grip of iron forceps.

"Listen there!" he muttered. "That's his child, do you hear? He perpetuates his wicked race without a scruple. Wouldn't it be a good thing now to cut down the poisonous weed root and branch?"

I stared at him in horror. Hardly till this moment had the fact of Jason's being married recurred to me since I first heard of it the night before.

"His child?" I echoed.

"What's the fool gaping at? Would his pretty deception be complete without a wife and baby in the background to spur his fancy?"

The door of the adjoining house was opened and a light footfall came down the steps. I saw a devil leap into Duke's eyes, and on the instant sprung at him.

He had me down directly, for his strength was fearful, but I clutched him frantically as I fell, and he couldn't shake me off.

Struggling—sobbing—warding my head as best I could from his battering blows—I yet could find voice to cry from the ground—"Jason, in God's name run! He's going to murder you!"

Up and down on the pavement—bruised, bleeding, wrenched this way and that, but never letting go my hold, I felt my strength, already exhausted by the long toiling of the night, ebbing surely from me. Then in the moment of its final collapse the dreadful incubus was snatched from me, and I rose half-blinded to my feet to see Duke in the grasp of a couple of stalwart navvies, who on their way to work had come to my assistance.

Trapped and overcome, he made no further struggle, but submitted quietly to his captors, his chest rising and falling convulsively.

"Don't let him go!" I panted; "he means murder!"

"We've got him fast enough," said one burly fellow. "Any bones broke, master?"

"No," said I; "I'm only a bit bruised."

"Renny," said the prisoner, in a low, broken voice, "have you ever known me lie?"

"Never. What then?"

"Tell them to take their hands off and I'll go."

"That won't do. You may come back."

"Not till the inquest's over. Is that a fair offer? I can do nothing here now. I only ask one thing—that I may speak a word, standing at the gate, to that skulking coward yonder. I swear I won't touch him or pass inside the gate."

I turned to the two men.

"I'll answer for him now," I said. "He never says what he doesn't mean. You can let him go."

They did so reluctantly, remonstrating a little and ready to pounce on him at once did he show sign of breaking his parole.

He picked up his hat and walked straight to the gate. Jason, who had been standing on the upmost step of the flight that led to the open door, regarding the strange struggle beneath him with starting eyes, moved a pace or two nearer shelter, with his head slewed backward in a hangdog fashion.

"Mr. Trender," said Duke, in a hideous, mocking voice, "Miss Dolly Mellison sends her compliments and she drowned herself last night."

I could see my brother stagger where he stood, and his face grow pale as a sheet.

"I won't discuss the matter further just now," went on the cripple, "as I am under promise to these gentlemen. After the inquest I may, perhaps, have something to say to you."

He swept him a grotesque, ironical bow, another to us, and walked off down the street.

When he was out of sight, I turned to the men, thanked them warmly for their assistance, recompensed them to the best of my ability and ran up the steps to the house.

I found my brother inside, leaning white and shaky against the wall.

I shut the door and addressed myself to him roughly.

"Come," I said. "There's a necessity for action here. Where can we talk together?"

"How did you find me?" he said, faintly. "It isn't true, is it?—no—not there"—for I was turning to the door of a back room that seemed to promise privacy.

"Where, then?" I said, impatiently. "Hurry, man! This is no time for dallying."

He tried to pull himself together. For the moment he seemed utterly unnerved.

"Jason," cried a voice from the very room I had approached.

I dropped my stick with a crash on the floor.

"Who's that?" I said, in a loud, wavering voice.

The handle turned. He came weakly from his corner to put himself before me. It was too late, for the door had opened and a woman, with a baby in her arms, was standing on the threshold.

And the woman was Zyp.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE TABLES TURNED.

In the first shock of the vision I did not realize to its full extent the profoundness of my brother's villainy or of my own loss. Indeed, for the moment I was so numbed with amazement as to find place for no darker sentiment in my breast.

"Why, it's Renny!" said Zyp, and my heart actually rose with a brief exultation to hear my name on her lips once more.

The game once taken out of his hands, Jason, with characteristic sang froid, withdrew into the background, prepared to let the waters of destiny thunder over his head.

The very complication of the situation reacted upon him in such manner, I think, as to brace him up to a single defiance of fate. From the moment Zyp appeared he was almost his brazen self again.

"Zyp," I muttered, "what are you doing here?"

"What a wife generally does in her husband's house, old fellow—getting in the way."

It was my brother who spoke, and in a moment the truth burst upon me.

"You are married?" I said.

"Yes," said Zyp; "this is our baby."

"You dog!" I cried—— I turned upon him madly. "You hound! You dog!"

Zyp threw herself upon her knees on the threshold of the room.

"Yes," she cried, "he is, and I never knew it till two nights ago, when the girl found her way here. She didn't know he had a wife and it broke her heart. I can understand that now. But you mustn't hurt him, Renny."

"The girl has drowned herself, Zyp."

"And not for you, Renny? He said it was you she loved and that he was the mediator. Was that a lie?"

"It was a lie!"

"I thought then it was. I never believed him as I believed you. But tell me you won't hurt him—he's my husband. Swear on this, Renny."

With an infinitely pathetic action she held toward me the little bundle she had clasped all through in her arms. It woke and wailed as she lifted it up.

"It cries to you, too," she said; "my little Zyp, that pleads for her daddy."

Jason gave a short, ironical laugh.

Sick at heart, I motioned the young mother to rise.

"Not till you swear," she said.

"I swear, Zyp."

She got up then and led the way into the little dingy sitting-room from which she had issued. A cradle stood by the fire and an empty feeding bottle lay on the table. How strange it seemed that Zyp should own them!

Jason followed as far as the door, where he stood leaning.

Then in the cold light of morning I saw how wan was the face of the changeling of old days; how piercing were her eyes; how sadly had the mere animal beauty shrunk to make way for the soul.

"You are brown, Renny," she said, with a pitiful attempt at gayety. "You look old and wise to us poor butterflies of existence."

"Oh," said Jason. "I see you are set for confidences and that I'm in the way. I'll go out for a walk."

"Stop!" I cried, turning on him once more. "Go, as far as I am concerned, and God grant I may never see your face again. But understand one thing. Keep out of the way of the man I fought with just now for your sake. He promised, but even the promises of good and

just men may fail under temptation. Keep out of his way, I warn you—now and always.”

“I’m obliged to you,” he answered, in a high-strung voice; “it seems to be a choice of evils. I prefer evil anyway in the open air.”

I said not a word more and he left us, and I heard the front door close on him. Then I turned to Zyp with an agony I could not control, and she was crooning over her baby.

“Zyp, I oughtn’t to say it, I know. But—oh, Zyp! I thought all these years you might be waiting for me.”

“Hush, Renny! You wrote so seldom, and—and I was a changeling, you know, and longed for light and pleasure. And he seemed to promise them—he was so beautiful, and so loving when he chose.”

“And you married him?”

“Dad wouldn’t hear of it. Sometimes I think, Renny, he was your champion—dad, I mean—and wanted to keep me for you; and the very suspicion made me rebellious. And in the end, we were married at a registrar’s office, there in Winton, unknown to anybody.”

“How long ago was that?”

“It was last February, and sometime in August dad found it out and there was a scene. So Jason brought me to London.”

“Why, what was he doing to keep a wife?”

“I know nothing about that. Such things never enter my head, I think. He always seemed to have money. Perhaps dad gave it to him. He was afraid of Jason, I’m sure.”

“Zyp, why didn’t you ever—why did none of you ever write to me about this?”

“Why, dad wrote, Renny! I know he did, the day we left. He wanted you to come home again, now he was alone.”

“To come home? I never got the letter.”

“But he wrote, I’m certain, and didn’t Jason tell you?”

“He told me nothing—I didn’t even know he was married till yesterday.”

I bent over the young wife as she sat rocking her baby.

"Zyp, I must go. My heart is very full of misery and confusion. I must walk it off or sleep it off, or I think perhaps I shall go mad."

"Did you love that girl, Renny?"

"No, Zyp. I have never had but one love in my life; and that I must say no more about. I have to speak to you, however, about one who did—a fierce, strong man, and utterly reckless when goaded to revenge. He is a fellow-workman of mine—he used to be my best friend—and, Zyp, his whole unselfish heart was given to this poor girl. But it was her happiness he strove after, and when he fancied that was centered in me—not him—he sacrificed himself and urged me to win. And I should have tried, for I was very lonely in the world, but that Jason—you know the truth already, Zyp—Jason came and took her from me; that was three months ago, and last night she drowned herself."

Zyp looked up at me. Her eyes were swimming in tears.

"I suppose a better woman would leave such a husband," she said, with a pitiful sigh, "but I think of the little baby, Renny."

"A true woman, dear, would remain with him, as you will in his dark hour. That is coming now; that is what I want to warn you about in all terrible earnestness. Zyp, this fierce man I told you about came here this morning to kill your husband. I was in time to keep him back, but that was only once. A promise was forced from him that he would do nothing more until the inquest is over. That promise, unless he is dreadfully tempted, he will keep, I am sure. But afterward Jason won't be safe for an hour. You must get him to leave here at once, Zyp."

She had risen and was staring at me with frightened eyes. I could not help but act upon her terror.

"Don't delay. Move now—this day, if possible, and go secretly and hide yourselves where he can't find you. I don't think Jason will be wanted at the inquest. In any

case he mustn't be found. I say this with all the earnestness I am capable of. I know the man and his nature, and the hideous wrong he has suffered."

I wrote down my address and gave it to her.

"Remember," I said, "if you ever want me to seek me there. But come quietly and excite the least observation you can."

Then gently I lifted the flannel from the tiny waxen face lying on her arm, and, kissing the pink lips for her mother's sake, walked steadily from the room and shut the door behind me.

As I gained the hall, Jason, returning, let himself in by the front door. He looked nervous and flustered. For all his bravado he had found, I suppose, a very brief ordeal of the streets sufficient.

"I should like a word with you," I said, "before I go."

"Well," he answered, "the atmosphere seems all mysterious and righteousness. Come in here."

He preceded me into the front room and closed the door upon us. Then I looked him full in the face.

"Who killed Modred?" I said.

He gave a great start; then a laugh.

"You're the one to answer that," he said.

"You lie, as you always do. My eyes have been opened at last—at last, do you hear? Modred was never drowned. He recovered and was killed by other means during the night."

His affectation of merriment stopped, cut through at a blow. A curious spasm twitched his face.

"Well," he muttered, looking down, away from me, "that may be true and you none the less guilty."

"A hateful answer and quite worthy of you," I said, quietly. "Nevertheless, you know it, as well as I do, to be a brutal falsehood."

I seized him by the shoulder and forced him to lift his hangdog face.

"My God!" I whispered, awfully, "I believe you killed him yourself."

It burst upon me with a shock. Why should he not have done it? His resentment over Zyp's preference

was as much of a motive with him as with me—ten thousand times more so, taking his nature into account and the immunity from risk my deed had opened to him. I remembered the scene by the river, when Zyp was drowning, and my hand shook as I held him.

He sprung from me.

"I didn't—I didn't!" he shrieked. "How dare you say such a thing?"

"Oh," I groaned, "shall I hand you over to Duke Straw, when the time comes, and be quit of you forever?"

"Don't be a cruel brute!" he answered, almost whimpering. "I didn't do it, I tell you. But perhaps he didn't die of drowning, and I may have had my suspicions."

"Of me?"

"No, no—not really of you, upon my oath; but some one else."

"And yet all these years you have held the horror over my head and have made wicked capital out of it."

"I wanted the changeling—that was why."

I threw him from me, so that he staggered against the wall.

"You are such a despicable beast," I said, "that I'll pollute my hands with you no longer. Answer me one thing more. Where's the letter my father wrote to me when you were leaving Winton?"

"It went to your old lodgings. The man handed it to me to give to you when I called there."

"And you tore it up?"

"Yes. I didn't want you to know Zyp and I were married."

"Now, I've done with you. For Zyp's sake I give you the chance of escaping from the dreadful fate that awaits you if you get in that other's way. I warn you—nothing further. For the rest, never come near me again, or look to me to hold out a finger of help to you. Beyond that, if you breathe one more note of the hideous slander with which you have pursued me for years, I go heart and soul with Duke in destroying you. You may be guilty of Modred's death, as you are in God's sight the

murderer of that unhappy child who has gone to His judgment."

"I didn't kill him," he muttered again; and with that, without another word or look, I left him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A SUDDEN DETERMINATION.

The inquest was over; the jury had returned a merciful verdict; the mortal perishing part of poor, weak and lovable Dolly was put gently out of sight for the daisies to grow over by and by.

Jason had been called, but, not responding, and his presumed evidence being judged not necessarily material to the inquiry, had escaped the responsibility of an examination and, as I knew, for the time being at least a deadlier risk. Mention of his name left an ugly stain on the proceedings, and that was all.

Now, night after night, alone with myself and my despair, I sat brooding over the wreck and ruin of my life. Zyp, so far as this life was concerned, could never now be mine; and full realization of this had burst upon me only at the moment when the moral barrier that had divided me from her was broken down. That wound must forevermore eat like a cancer within me.

Then, in the worst writhing moments of my anguish, a new savage lust of sleuth began to prick and crawl over me like a leprosy. If all else were taken from me I still had that interest to cheer me through life—the hounding of my brother's murderer. This feeling was curiously intermingled with a revival in my heart of loyalty to Modred. He had been my friend—at least inextricably kin to me in a common cause against the world. When I turned to the vile figure of the brother who survived, the dead boy's near-forgotten personality showed up in a light almost lovably humorous and pathetic. My fevered soul bathed itself in the memory of his whimsi-

calities, till very tenderness begot an oath that I would never rest till I had tracked down his destroyer.

And was Jason that? If it were so, I could afford to stand aside for the present and leave him to the mercy of a deadlier Nemesis he had summoned to his own undoing.

Set coldly, at the same time, on a justice that should be passionless, I bore in mind my brother's hint of a suspicion that involved some other person whom he left nameless. This might be—probably was—a mere ruse to throw me off the scent. In any case I should refuse to hold him acquitted in the absence of directer evidence.

Still I could not stay a certain speculative wandering of my thoughts. If not Jason—who then? There were in the house that night but the usual family circle and Dr. Crackenthorpe. What possible temptation could induce any one of them to a deed so horrible? Jason alone of them had the temptation and the interest, and, above all, the nature to act upon a hideous impulse. On Jason must lie the suspicion till he could prove himself innocent.

It was not until about the third night of my gloomy pondering that the sudden resolution was formed in me to leave everything and return to my father. The fact of Zyp's reference to the letter he had sent me had been so completely absorbed in the tense excitement of the last few days that when in a moment it recurred to me I leaped to my feet and began pacing the room like a caged animal that scents freedom.

So the old man in his loneliness desired me back again. Why not go? The accustomed life here seemed impossible to me any longer. The notoriety attaching to these pitiful proceedings was already making my regular attendance at the office a sore trial. Duke had sent in his resignation the very morning of his attack on me before Jason's house. All old ties were rent and done with. I was, in a modest way, financially independent, for Ripley's generous acknowledgment of my services, coupled with my own frugal manner of life, had enabled

me to put into certain investments sufficient to produce an interest that would keep me, at least, from starvation.

And, in addition, how could I prosecute my secret inquiries better than on the very scene of the deed? I would go. My decision was sudden and final. I would go.

Then and there I sat down and wrote a brief letter to my father.

"I have only within the last few days," I said, "learned of the letter you wrote me three months ago. Jason destroyed it lest I should find out he was married to Zyp. I now tell you that I am ready to do as you wish—to return and live with you, if you still desire it. In any case, I can endure my present life here no longer. Upon receipt of a word from you I will come."

As I wrote, the wind, bringing clouds of rain with it, was booming and thundering against the window. Soft weather had succeeded to the ice-breathing blasts of a few days back, and I thought of a lonely grave out there in the night of London, and of how just now the water must be gushing in veins and runnels over its clayey barrow.

Dolly—Dolly! May it wash clean your poor wounded heart. "After life's fitful fever" you sleep well; while we—oh, shamed and fallen child! Which of us who walks straightly before our fellows would not forego passion and revenge, and all the hot raptures of this blood-red world, to lie down with you deep in the cool, sweet earth and rest and forget?

I went out and posted my letter. The streets were swept clean of their human refuse. Only a few belated vehicles trundled it out against the downpour, setting their polished roofs as shields against the myriad-pointed darts of the storm.

Feeling nervous and upset, I was approaching my own door, when a figure started from a dark angle of the wall close by and stood before me.

"Duke!" I cried.

He was drenched with rain and mud—his dark clothes splashed and saturated from boot to collar. His face in

the drowned lamplight was white as wax, but his eyes burned in rings of shadow. I was shocked beyond expression at his dreadful appearance.

"What have you been doing with yourself?" I cried. "Duke! Come in, for pity's sake, and rest, and let us talk."

"With you?" he muttered, in a mad, grating voice. "With any Trender? I came to ask you where he's in hiding—that's all."

"I know no more than you do."

"You lie! You're keeping his secret for him. What were her claims compared to family ties—devil's ties—such as yours? You know, but you won't give him up to me."

"I don't know."

He raised and ground his hands together in exquisite passion.

"They drive me to madness," he cried, "but in the end—in the end I shall have him! To hold him down and torture the life out of him inch by inch, with the terror in his eyes all the time! Why, I could kill him by that alone—by only looking at him."

He gloated over the picture called up in his soul. If ever demon's eyes looked from a human face, they looked from his that night.

"Duke," I whispered in horror, "you have terrible cause for hate, I know; but oh, think of how one grain of forgiveness on your part would stand you with—with God, Duke."

He gave a wretched, sickening laugh.

"By and by," he cried. "But tell me first where he's hiding!"

"I don't know," I said. "Duke——" and I held out a yearning hand to him.

At that he struck at me savagely and, running crookedly into the night, was lost in the rainy darkness.

CHAPTER XXX.

I GO HOME.

So much of strange incident had crowded with action the long years of my life in London, that, as I walked from the station down into the old cathedral town, a feeling of wonder was on me that the hand of time had dealt so gently with the landmarks of my youth. Here were the same old gates and churches and houses I had known, unaltered unless for an additional film of the fragrant lichen of age. The very ruins of the ancient castle and palace were stone by stone such as I remembered them.

There was frost in the air, too; so that sometimes, as I moved dreamily onward, a sense as if all that gap of vivid life were a vanished vision and unreality moved strongly in me. Then it seemed that presently I should saunter into the old mill to find my father and Zyp and Jason sitting down as usual to the midday meal.

My appearance was so changed that none of all who would formerly have somewhat sourly acknowledged my passing with a nod now recognized me.

Suddenly I caught sight of Dr. Crackenthorpe, moving on in front of me in company with another man. The doctor was no more altered than his surroundings, judged at least by his back view. This presented the same long rusty coat of a chocolate color—relic of a by-gone generation, I always thought—cut after a slightly sporting fashion, which he wore in all my memory of him throughout the winter; half-Wellington boots, into which the ends of his trousers were tucked, and a flat-topped, hard felt hat, under the brim of which his lank tails of brick-colored hair fell in dry, thin tassels.

The man he walked with seemed old and bent, and he moved with a spiritless, hesitating step that appeared to cause the other some impatience.

I was so far from claiming knowledge of this second person that, when he turned his head aside a moment to gaze upon something as I came near, it was with a most painful shock that I discovered it to be my father.

I hurried up, calling to him. He gave a great start—they both did—and turned round to meet me.

Then I was terribly taken aback to see the change that had come over him. He, whom four years ago I had left hale, self-reliant, powerful in body and intellect, was to all appearance a halting and decrepit old man, in whom the worst sign was the senile indecision of his eyes.

He came at me, holding out both his hands in welcome with trembling eagerness, and I was much moved to see some glint of tears furrowing his cheeks.

"Renalt, my boy—Renalt, my boy!" he cried in a glad-some, thin voice, and that was all; for he could find words for no more, but stood looking up in my face—I topped him now—with a half-searching, half-deprecating earnestness of perusal.

"Well, dad," I answered, cheerfully—for I would give no hint of surprise before the other—"you said 'come,' and here I am."

"A brave fellow—a brown, strong man!" He was feeling me over as he spoke—running his thumb down the sinews of my hands—pinching the firm arm in my sleeve.

"A strong man, my boy," he said. "I bred him—he's my son—I was the same myself once."

"You find your father altered—eh, Mr. Bookbinder?"

"If he is at all, doctor, it's nothing that won't improve on a little management and wholesome company."

"Well, he's had plenty of mine."

"Then his state's accounted for," I said.

The long man looked at me with an expression not pleasant.

"Ay," he said. "There's the old spirit forward again. We've done very well without it since the last of the fry took themselves off."

"It's not company you batten on, doctor," I said. "But loneliness breeds other evils than coin-collecting."

He stared at me a moment, then took off his hat with an ironical sweep.

"I mustn't forget my manners to a London rattle," he said. "No doubt you pride yourself on a very pretty wit, sir. But while you talk my lunch grows cold; so I'll even take the liberty of wishing you good-morning."

He walked off, snapping his fingers on either side of him.

When he was gone, I took my father's arm and passed it through mine.

"Strong boy," he said, affectionately—then whispered in my ear: "That's a terrible man, Renalt! Be careful before you offend him."

I looked at him in startled wonder. This was not how he was used to speak.

"I hold him as cheap as any other dog," said I.

He patted my hand with a little sigh of comfortable admiration.

"I want you at home," he said, "all to myself. I'm glad that you've come, Renalt. It's lonely in the old mill nowadays."

As we walked, my heart was filled with remorseful pondering over the wrecked figure at my side. Why had I never known of this change in it? What had caused it, indeed? Gloomy, sinister remembrances of my one-time suspicion of some nameless hold that the doctor had over my father stirred in me and woke a deep anger against fate. Were we all of us, for no fault of our own, to be forever stunted in our lives and oppressed by the malign influence of the place that had given us birth? It was hateful and monstrous. What fight could a human being show against foes who shot their poison from places beyond the limits of his understanding?

A trifle more aged looking—a trifle more crazy and dark and weather-stained—the old mill looked to my returning vision, and that was all. The atmosphere of the place was cold and eerie and haunted as ever.

But a great feast awaited the returned prodigal. The

sitting-room table fairly sparkled with unwonted dainties of the season, and a red fire crackled on the hearth.

My father pressed me into a chair; he heaped good things upon my plate; he could not do enough to prove the warmth of his welcome and the pathos of loneliness that underlay it.

"Here's to my strong son!" he cried, pledging me gayly in a glass of weak wine and water; "my son that I'm feasting for all the doctor—for all the doctor, I say!"

"The doctor, dad?"

"He wouldn't have had it, Renalt. He said it was throwing pearls before swine and most wicked waste. I wouldn't listen to him this time—not I."

"Why, what has he got to do with it?"

"Hush!" he paused in his sipping and looked all about him, with a fearful air of listening.

"He's a secret man," he whispered, "and the mill's as full of ears as a king's palace."

I made no answer, but went on with my meal, though I had much ado to swallow it; but to please my father I made a great show of enjoying what was put before me.

One thing I noticed with satisfaction, and that was that my father drank sparingly and that only of wine watered to insipidity. Indeed, I was to find that a complete change in him in this respect was not the least marvelous sign of the strange alteration in his temperament.

The meal over, we drew our chairs to the fire, and talked the afternoon away on desultory subjects. By and by some shadowy spirit of his old intellectual self seemed to flash and flicker fitfully through his conversation.

The afternoon deepened into dusk; strange phantoms, wrought of the leaping flame, came out of corners or danced from wall to ceiling and were gone. He was in the midst of a fine flow of words descriptive of some metaphysical passages he had lately encountered in a book, when his voice trailed off and died away. He

crept to me and whispered in my ear: "He's there, behind the door!"

I jumped to my feet, rushed across the room and—met Dr. Crackenthorpe on the threshold.

"Can't you come in like a decent visitor?" I cried, stamping my foot on the floor.

He looked pale and, I thought, embarrassed, and he backed a little before my onset.

"Why, what's all this?" he said. "I walked straight up the stairs, as a body should."

"You made no noise," I said, black and wrathful. "What right have you to prowl into a private house in that fashion?"

For a moment his face fell menacing. But it cleared—if such may express the lightening of those muddy features—almost immediately.

"Here's a fine reception!" he cried, "for one who comes to greet the returned prodigal in all good comradeship; and to an old friend, too!"

"You were never ours," I muttered.

He plucked a bottle of gin from under his arm, where he had been carrying it.

"Your father has given up the pernicious habit," he said, with a grin, "but I thought, perhaps, he'd break his rule for once on such a stupendous occasion as this. Let us pledge you in a full bumper, Mr. Renalt."

"Pledge whom you like," I answered, surlily, "but don't ask a return from me. I don't drink spirit."

"Then you miss a very exquisite and esthetic pleasure, I may say. Try it this only time. Glasses, Mr. Trender."

I saw my father waver, and guessed this unwonted liberality on the part of the doctor was calculated to some end of his own. In an access of rage I seized the full bottle and spun it with all my might against the wooden wall of the room. It crashed into a thousand flying splinters, and the pungent liquor flooded the floor beneath.

For an instant the doctor stood quite dumfounded, and went all the colors of the prism. Then he walked very gently to the door and turned on the threshold.

"You were always an unlicked cub," he said, softly, "but this transcends all your past pleasantries.

"I mean it to," I said, still in a towering passion. "I intend it as a hint that you had best keep away from here. I've no cause to remember you with love, and from this time, understand, you've no claim of friendship upon this household."

"I will remember," he said. "I always do. Perhaps I've another sort of claim, though. Who knows?"

He nodded at me grimly once or twice, like an evil mandarin, and walked off, down the stairs.

I looked at my father. He was sitting, his hands clasping the elbows of his chair, with a wild, lost look upon his face.

"What have you done?" he whispered. "Renalt, what have you done? We are in that man's power to ruin us at a word!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

ONE MYSTERY EXPLAINED.

The explanation I had desired for the morrow I determined to bring about there and then. I went and stood above the old man and looked down upon him.

"Dad," I said, softly, "once before, if you remember, I came to you heart-full of the question that I am now going to put to you again. I was a boy then, and likely you did right in refusing me your confidence. Now I am a man, and, dad, a man whose soul has been badly wounded in its sore struggle with life."

He had drooped forward as I began, but at this he raised his head and looked me earnestly in the eyes.

"I know, Renalt. It was I broke the bottle then, as you have now. You have taken the lead into your own hands. What is it you'd ask?"

"Don't you know, dad?"

"Yes, I know. Give me a little time and perhaps some day I'll tell you."

"Why not now, dad?"

He seemed to muse a little space, with his brows gone into furrows of calculation.

"Why not?" he muttered. "Why not?"

Suddenly he leaned forward and said softly:

"Has it ever concerned you to think what might be the source of your father's income?"

"I have thought of it, dad, many and many a time. It wasn't for me to ask. I have tried to force myself to believe that it came from our grandfather."

"He was a just man, Renalt, and a hard. I married against his will and he never spoke to me afterward."

"But the mill——"

"The mill he left to me, as it had been left to him. He would not, in his justice, deprive me of the means of living. 'What my hands have wrought of this, his may do,' he wrote. But all his little personal estate he willed elsewhere."

"And you never worked the mill?"

"For a time I worked it, to some profit. We began not all empty-handed. She brought a little with her."

"My mother?"

At the word he half-started from his chair and sunk back into it again. His eyes blazed as I had not seen them do since my return.

"For twenty years and more," he shrieked, "that name has never been on your lips—on the lips of any one of you. I would have struck him down without pity that spoke it!"

I stood looking at him amazed. For a moment he seemed transformed—translated out of his fallen self—for a moment and no more. His passion left him quakingly.

"Ah!" he cried, with a gasp, and looked up at me beseeching—"you're not offended—you are not offended, Renalt?"

"No, no," I said, impatiently. "You must tell me why, dad. You will, won't you?"

He answered with a sobbing moan.

"You, her son, must not know. Haven't I been faith-

ful to her? Have I ever by word or sign dishonored her memory in her children's ears—my boy, have I?"

"I have never heard you mention her till now. I have never dreamed of her but as a nameless shadow, father."

"Let her be so always. She wrecked my life—in a day she made me the dark brute you remember well. I was not so always, Renalt. This long, degraded life of despair and the bestial drowning of it were her doing—hers, I tell you. Remorse! It has struggled to master me, and I have laughed it away—all these years I have laughed it away. Yet it was pitiful when she died. A heart of stone would have wept to see her. But mine was lead—lead—lead."

He dropped his head on his breast. I stood darkly pondering in the quiet room. There seemed a stir and rustling all round within the house, as if ghostly foot-falls were restlessly pacing out their haunting penance.

"Renalt," said my father, presently; "never speak of her; never mention her by that name. She passed and left me what I am. I closed the mill and shut its door and that of my heart to every genial influence that might help it to forget. I had no wish to forget. In silence and solitariness I fed upon myself till I became like to a madman. Then I roused and went abroad more, for I had a mission of search to attend to."

"You never found him?"

The words came to my lips instinctively. How could I fail to interpret that part, at least, of the miserable secret?

"To this day—never."

He answered preoccupied—suddenly heedless of my assurance in so speaking. A new light had come to his face—an unfamiliar one. I could have called it almost the reflection of cunning—vanity—a self-complacent smugness of retrospect.

"But I found something else," he cried, with a twitching smirk.

"What was that?"

He leaned forward in a listening attitude.

"Hush!" he murmured. "Was that a noise in the house?"

"I heard nothing, dad."

He beckoned me to stand closer—to stoop to him.

"A jar of old Greek and Roman coins."

He fell back in his chair and stared up at me with frightened eyes. The mystery was out, and an awful dismay seized him that at length in one moment of sentiment he had parted with the secret that had been life to him.

"What have I said?" he whispered, stilly. "Renalt, you won't give any heed to the maundering of an old man?"

I looked down on him pityingly.

"Don't fear me, father," I said, almost with a groan. "I will never breathe a word of it to anybody."

"Good, dear boy," he answered, smiling. "I can trust you, I know. You were always my favorite, Renalt, and——"

He broke off with a sudden, sharp cry.

"My favorite," and he stared up at me. "My favorite? So kings treat their favorites!"

He passed a nervous hand across his forehead, his wild eyes never leaving my face. I could make nothing of his changing moods.

"What about the jar of coins?" I said.

"Ah!" he muttered, the odd expression degrading his features once more. "They were such a treasure it was never one man's lot to acquire before or since—heaven's compensation for the cruelty of the world."

"Where did you find them?"

"In an ancient barrow of the dead," he whispered, looking fearfully around him—"there, on the downs. It had rained heavily, and there had been a subsidence. I was idly brooding, and idly flung a stone through a rent in the soil. It tinkled upon something. I put in my hand and touched and brought away a disk of metal. It was a golden coin. I covered all up and returned at night, unearthed the jar and brought it secretly home. It was no great size, but full to the throat of gold. Then I

knew that life had found me a new lease of pleasure. I hid the jar where no one could discover it and set about to enjoy the gift. It came in good time. The mill had ceased to yield. My store of money was near spent. I selected three or four of the likeliest coins and carried them to a man in London that bought such things—a numismatist he called himself. If he had any scruples he smothered them then and afterward, in face of such treasures as it made his eyes shoot green to look upon. He asked me at first where I had got them. Hunting about the downs, I said. That was the formula. He never asked for more. He gave me a good price for them, one by one, and made his heavier profit, no doubt, on each. They yielded richly and went slowly. They made an idle, debauched man of me, who forgot even his revenge in the glut of possession."

He seemed even then to accuse himself, through an affectation rather than a conviction of avarice.

"They went slowly," he repeated; "till—till—Renalt, I would have loved you as boy was never loved, if you had killed that doctor, as you killed——" he stopped and gave a thin cry of anguish.

"I didn't kill Modred, father. I know it now."

"No, no—you didn't," he half-whined in a cowering voice. "Don't say I said it. I caught myself up."

"We'll talk about that presently. The doctor——"

"That night, you remember," he cried, passionately, "when I dropped a coin and he saw it—that was the beginning. Oh, he has a hateful greed for such things. A wicked, suspicious nature. He soon began cajoling, threatening, worming my secret out of me. I had to silence him now and again or he would have exposed me to the world and wrenched my one devouring happiness from me."

"You gave him some of the coins?"

"He has had enough to melt into a grill as big as St. Lawrence's, and he shall fry on it some day. More than that—more than that!"

He clenched his hands in impotent fury.

"There was one thing in the jar worth a soul's ran-

som—a cameo, Renalt, that I swear was priceless—I, who speak from intuition—not knowledge. The beauty of the old world was crystallized in it. An emperor would have pawned his crown to buy it.”

His words brought before me with a shock the night of Modred’s death, when I had stood listening on the stairs.

“One evening—a terrible evening, Renalt—when I went to fetch a new bribe for him from the hiding-place (he demanded it before he would move a finger to help that poor boy upstairs), I found this cameo gone. He swore he hadn’t set eyes on it, and to this day I believe he lied. How can I tell—how can I tell? Twenty times a week, perhaps, my vice brought the secret almost within touch of discovery. Sometimes for days together I would carry this gem in my pocket, and take it out when alone and gaze on it with exquisite rapture. Then for months it would lie safely hidden again. If I had dropped and lost it in one of my fits—as he suggested—should I have never heard of it again? Renalt—he held out two trembling hands to me—“it was the darling of my heart! Find it for me and I will bless you forever.”

He ended almost with a sob. I could have wept myself over the pitiful degeneration of a noble intellect.

“Father, you said he cajoled—threatened. Didn’t you ever reveal to him——”

“Where the jar was hid? No; a million times, no! He would have sucked me dry of the last coin. He knew that I had made a rich find—no more.”

“And on the strength of that vague surmise you have allowed him to blackmail you all these years?”

He hung his head, as if cruelly abashed.

“You don’t know the man as I do,” he cried, in a low voice. “He is a devil—not a man.”

I was utterly shocked and astounded.

“Well,” I said at length. “I won’t ask you for your secret. To share it with any one would kill the zest, no doubt.”

He lifted his head with a thin wail.

I put my hand gently on his shoulder.

"Dad," I said, "I must never leave you again."

He seized my hand and kissed it.

"Harkee, Renalt," he whispered. "Many are gone, but there are some left. Could I find out where the cameo is, we would take it, and what remains, and leave this hateful place—you and I—and bury ourselves in some beautiful city under the world, where none could find us, and live in peace and comfort to the end."

"Peace can never be mine again, father. Would you like to know why? Would you like to know what has made a sorrowful, haunted man of me, while you were living on at the old mill here these five years past?"

"Tell me," he said. "Confide in this old, broken, selfish man, who has that love in his heart to seek comfort for you where he can find none himself."

Then, standing up in the red dusk of the room, I gave him my history. "Nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice." And he sat with face darkened from me, and quivered only when he heard of Jason's villainy.

And at the end he lifted up his voice and cried:

"Oh, Absolom, my son—my son, Absolom!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

OLD PEGGY.

The months that immediately followed my home-coming were passed by me in an aimless, desultory temporizing with the vexed problems that, unanswered, were consuming my heart.

I roamed the country as of old and renewed my acquaintance with bird, fish and insect. Starting to gather a collection of butterflies and moths—many of which were local and rare—with the mere object of filling in the lapses of a restless ennui and in some dull gratitude to a pursuit that had helped me to a little degree of late success, I rapidly rose to an interest in its formation that became, I may say, the then chief happiness of my

life. To my father, also, it brought, in the arrangement and classification of specimens, a certain innocent pleasure that helped to restore him to some healthier show of manliness moral and physical.

Poor, broken old man! I would not now have stultified his pathetic confidence in me for the biggest bribe the world could hold out.

Yet it must not be supposed I ever really for a moment lost sight of the main issues of a mystery that was bitten into my heart with an acid that no time could take the strength from. Sometime, sooner or later, I knew it would be revealed to me who it was that killed Modred.

As to that lesser secret of the coins—it troubled me but little. Free of that dread of possible ruin that appeared to cling hauntingly to my father, I was not disinclined to the belief that the complete dissipation of his bugbear estate might prove after all his moral salvation. Remove its source of irritation, and would not the sore heal?

Sometimes in the full pressure of this thought I found it almost in my mind to hunt and hunt until I found his hiding-place and to commit its remaining treasures to the earth or the waters. Then it would seem a base thing to do—a mean advantage to take of his confidence—and I would put the thought from me.

Still, however I might decide ultimately, this determination dwelt firmly and constantly in me—to oppose by every means in my power any further levying of blackmail on the part of the doctor.

This unworthy eccentricity had not, to my knowledge, been near the mill since that night of my return. That he presently found means, nevertheless, of communicating with his victim, I was to find out by a simple chance.

June had come upon us leading this placidly monotonous life, when, returning one afternoon from a ramble after specimens, I found my father sitting upstairs in a mood so preoccupied that he did not notice my entrance. His head was bowed, his left arm drooping over one end of the table. Suddenly hearing my footsteps in

the room, he started and a gold coin fell from his hand and spun and tinkled on the boards.

"What's that?" I said.

He stooped and clutched it, and hugging it to his breast looked up in my face with startled eyes. But he gave no answer.

"Is it necessary to change another, dad?"

"No," he muttered.

A thought stung me like a wasp.

"Is it for a bribe?" I demanded. Still he kept silence.

"Father," I said, "give it to me."

"Renalt—I can't; I mustn't."

"Give it to me. If you refuse—I threaten nothing—but—give it to me!"

He held it forth in a shaking hand. I took it and slipped it into my pocket.

"Now," I said, sternly, "I am going to see Dr. Crackenthorpe."

He rose from his chair with a cry.

"You are mad, I tell you! You can do nothing—nothing."

"It is time this ceased for good and all, father. I stand between you now—remember that. You have to choose between me and that villain. Which is it to be?"

"Renalt—my son. It is for your sake!"

"I can look after my own interests. Which is it to be?"

He dropped back into his chair with a groan.

"Go, then," he muttered, "and God help you!"

I turned and left him. My heart was blazing with a fierce resentment. But I would not leave the house till my veins ran cooler, for no advantage of temper should be on the side of that frosty bloodsucker.

I wandered downstairs, past the door of the room of silence, but the rough jeering of the wheel within drove me away to where I could be out of immediate earshot of it.

From the kitchen at the back came the broken, whining voice of old Peggy Rottengoose, who yet survived and waited upon the meager household with a ghoulis faithfulness that no time could impair.

The words of some sardonic song came sterily from her withered lips. She was apt at such grewsome ditties:

“I saw three ravens up a tree—

Heigho!

I saw three ravens up a tree;

And they were black as black could be —

All down by the greenwood side, O!

“I stuck my penknife in their hearts—

Heigho!

I stuck my penknife in their hearts;

And the more I stuck it the blood gushed out;

All down by the greenwood side, O!”

I softly pushed open the door, that stood ajar, and looked in. The old creature was sitting crooning in a chair, a picture or print of some kind, at which she was gazing in a sort of hungry ecstasy, held out and down before her at arm's length. I stole on tiptoe behind her and sought to get a glimpse at that she devoured with her rheumy eyes.

“Why, what are you doing with that, Peg?” I said, with a start of surprise.

Cunning even under the spur of sudden discomfiture, she whipped the thing beneath her apron before she struggled to her feet and faced round upon me.

“What ails ye, Renalt?” she wheezed, in a voice like that of one winded by a blow—“to fright a body, sich like?”

“You needn't be frightened, unless you were doing something you shouldn't, you know.”

“Shud and shudn't,” she said, her yellow under jaw, scratched all over with fine wrinkles, moving like a barbel's. “I doesn't take my morals fro' a Trender.”

“You take all you can get, Peggy. Why not a picture with the rest?”

“My own nevvvy!” she cried, with an attenuated scream — “blessed son to Amelia as were George's first wife and died o' cramps o' the cold dew from a shift hung out on St. Bartlemey's day.”

“Now, Peggy,” I said sternly, “I saw that picture and

it wasn't of your nephew or of any other relation of yours. It was a silhouette, as they call it, of my brother, Modred, made when he was a little fellow, by some one in a show that came here, and it used to hang in Modred's room."

"Ye lie, Renalt!" she cried, panting at me. "It's Amelia's boy—and mayn't I enjoy the fruits o' my own heritage?"

"Let me look at it, then; and if I'm wrong I'll ask your pardon."

"Keep arf!" she cried, backing from me. "Keep arf, or I'll tear your weasand wi' my claws!"

I made a little rush and clutched her. She could not keep her promise without loosening her hold of the picture, but she butted at me, with her cap bobbing, and dinted my shin with her vicious old toes. Then, seeing it was all useless, she crumpled the paper up into a ball and, tossing it from her, fell back in her chair and threw her apron over her head.

I dived for the picture and smoothed out its creases. "Peggy!" I said.

"I tuk it—I tuk it!" wailed the old woman. "I tuk it fro' the wall when I come up wi' the blarnkets and nub-body were there to see!"

"Why did you take it and why have you riddled it with holes like this?"

She slipped down on her trembling knees.

"Don'tee be hard on me, Renalt—don'tee! I swear, I were frightened myself at what I done. I didn't hardly guess it would act so. Don'tee have me burnt or drowned, Renalt. It were a wicked thing to a body old enough to be your grandam, and I've but a little glint o' time left."

"I don't know what you mean, Peggy. You'd no business to take the picture, of course, and still less to treat it like this. But your nature's a thieving one, and I suppose you can't help it. Get off your knees. It's done, and there's an end of it."

She stopped her driveling moan and looked up at me queerly, I thought.

"Ay, I'd no call to do it, of course," she said. "Just

a body's absence o' mind, Renalt, ye see—same as pricking pastry in time to a toone like. I thought maybe if ye saw it ye'd want to tell the old man upstairs, and he's got the strong arm yet, for all the worm in his brain."

"I sha'n't tell him this time, but don't let me catch you handling any of our property again"; and I left the room.

A little flustered by my late tussle and hardly yet in a mood for the interview I clearly foresaw would be no amicable one, I wandered out, turning my footsteps, not at present in the direction of the doctor's house, but toward that part of the river called the "weirs," which ran straight away from the mill front. This was a pleasant, picturesque stretch down which the water, shaded by many stooping trees and bushes, washed and gurgled brightly. A railed pathway ran by it and, to the same side, cottages at intervals and little plats of flowering parterres.

It was a reach which, unpreserved, was much favored of the townsfolk for fishing.

A man was whipping the stream now in its broadest part, and I stopped to watch him. He was a rosy, well-knit fellow of 35 or so, with a good-humored, bibulous eye and a foolish underjaw.

"Any sport?" I asked.

"Plenty o' sport," said he, "but no fish."

"You're a philosopher, it seems."

"Mebbe I am, for what it may mean. A pint of ale 'ud cure it."

"Why not a pint of water? It's there and to spare."

"The beggar's tap, master. I arns my living."

"Well, buy your pot of ale out of it."

"I'd rather you tuk the responsibility off me."

"Well," said I, with a grin, "let's see you catch a fish and I'll stand treat."

He threw for some time in silence.

"I must be off," said I.

"Fair play, master! I harsn't got my fish yet."

"I can't wait all day for that."

"Then, pay up. You put no limit to the time."

I laughed and gave him the money, and he spat upon it for luck.

"You come fro' yon old mill, don'tee?" said he.

"Yes, I do. You know me, it appears. Who may you be?"

"They carls me saxton ower at St. John's yonder."

I received his answer with a little start. Were these the hands that had dug the grave for my dead brother?"

"They call you? What do you call yourself?" I said.

"High priest to the worms, wi' your honor's leave."

He stuck his tongue in his cheek and whipped out his fly again. This time it disappeared with a fat blob and his hand came smartly up. I watched him while he wheeled in his floundering prize.

"Ay," he went on, as he stooped to unhook the trout, "the worms and I works on the mutual-profit system. I feeds them and they feeds me. Sometimes"—he looked round and up at me slyly—"they shows a power o' gratitode ower an uncommon rich meal and makes me a particlar acknowledgment o' my services."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FACE TO FACE.

In the cool of the evening I knocked at Dr. Cracken-thorpe's front door. No one answering—his one servant was gadding, probably—I tried the handle, found it to be on the latch only, and walked in. The house was quiet as a desert, save that from the doctor's private consulting-room, as he called it, issued a little, weak, snoring sound.

I paused in the dusky passage before tapping at the closed door of this room. The whole place was faintly stringent with the atmosphere that comes from a poor habit of ventilation—an atmosphere like that emitted from crumbling old leather-bound folios. A ragged strip of carpet, so trodden up its middle to the very string as

to give the impression of a cinder-path running between dully flowering borders, climbed the flight of stairs before me, and stretched itself upon the landing above in an exhausted condition.

In a shallow alcove to one side of me stood a gaunt and voiceless old grandfather clock. A gas-browed bust of Pitt, rendered ridiculous by a perfect skull-cap of dust, stood on a bracket over a door opposite and a few anatomical prints of a dark and melancholy cast broke the monotony of the yellow walls.

Rendered none the less depressed in my errand by these dismal surroundings, I pulled myself together and tapped roundly on the doctor's door. No response followed. I knocked again and again, without result. At length I turned the handle and stepped of my own accord into the room.

He was sitting at the table, half his body sprawled over it and an empty tumbler rolled from one of his hands. Overhead, the row of murderers' busts looked down upon him with every variety of unclean expression, and seemed to prick their ears with sightless rapture over that bestial music of his soul.

The doors of a high cabinet, that in other brief visits I had never seen but closely locked, now stood open behind him, revealing row upon row of shelves, whereon hundreds of coins of many metals lay nicely arranged upon cotton wool. A few of these, also, lay about him on the table, and it was evident that a drunken slumber had overcome him while reviewing his mighty collection.

So deep was he in stupor that it was not until I hammered and shook the very table that he so much as stirred, and it was only after I had slipped round and jogged him roughly on the shoulder that he came to himself.

Then he dragged his long body up, swaying a little at first, and turning a stupid glazed eye on me two or three times and from me to the scattered coins and back again.

Suddenly he scrambled to his feet and backed from me.

"Thieves!" he yelled. "Thieves!"

"That'll do," I said, coolly. "I'm not the thief in this house, Dr. Crackenthorpe."

"What are you doing here?" he cried in a furious voice. "How did you get in? What do you want?"

"I want a word with you—I'll tell you what when you're quieter. As to getting in? I knocked half a dozen times and could get no answer. So I walked in."

"Curse the baggage!" he muttered. "Can't I rely upon one of them? I'll twist her pretty neck for this."

"You need twist nothing on my account. If I had failed to catch you now I would have dogged you for the opportunity."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" he said, with a laugh and a savage sneer. "Well, state your business and be off."

He spoke ferociously, but on the instant, seeing my eye caught by something lying on that part of the table his body had covered, dived for it and had it in his grasp. Then with a backward sweep of his hand he closed the cabinet doors and stood facing me.

"Now, sir," he said.

"Dr. Crackenthorpe," I answered, "you won't bully me away from my purpose. I'm a better man than you, and a stronger, I believe; but I won't begin by threatening."

"And that's very kind," he put in mockingly. "Still we'd better come to business, don't you think?"

"I'm coming to it and straight. What's that you've got in your hand?"

"What I intend to keep there. Is that all?"

"It's a cameo you stole from my father. Don't take the trouble to deny it."

"I don't take any trouble on your account, my good fellow. It's a cameo, as you very properly observe, but it happens to belong to me."

"By thieving, I'll swear. Now, Dr. Crackenthorpe, I intend to make you disgorge that cameo, together with one or two other trifles you've coerced my father into handing over to you."

"No?" he said, in the same jeering tone.

"Further than that, I intend to put a stop here and at once to that blackmailing process you've carried on for a number of years."

"Blackmailing's a very good word. It implies a reciprocity of interests. And how are you going to do all this?"

"You shall hear at the assizes, maybe."

He gave a laugh—quite rich for him; walked to the table, picked up deliberately the coins lying strewn there; stepped to the cabinet, deposited all therein; shut and locked it, and put the key in his pocket.

"Now, Mr. Bookbinder," he said, facing me again, "you've a very pretty intelligence; but you've not acquired in London that knowledge of the nine points of the law without which the tenth is empty talk. Here's a truism, also, that's escaped your matured observation, and it's called 'be sure of your facts before you speak.'"

"Am I not?" I cried, contemptuously.

"We'll see. Even a Crichton may suffer trifling lapses of memory. Let me lead yours back to that melancholy morning of your departure from the parent nest. Let me recall to you the gist of a few sentences that passed between your father and myself prior to the advent of your amiable brother, who was so hard on you. Some mention of a lost trifle was made then, I believe, and permission given me to keep it if I happened to alight upon it. Wasn't that so?"

"I can remember something of the sort," I muttered, gloomily.

"Ah, so far so good. Now, supposing that lost trifle were the very trinket your most observant eyes just now caught sight of?—I don't say it was; but we will presume so, for the sake of argument—supposing it were, should I not be entitled to consider it my own?"

"You may be lying," I said, angrily. "Probably you are. Where did you find it?"

"That is as much outside the question as your very offensive manner."

"You've always been the bane of our house. What do I care what you think of my manner? The sharper it

cuts, the better pleased am I. You've worked upon moods and weaknesses of the old man with your infernal cunning and got him under your thumb, as you think. Don't be too sure. You'll find an enemy of very different caliber in me. There's a law for blackmailers, though you mayn't think it."

He cocked his head on one side a moment, like a vile carrion crow; then came softly and pushed a lean finger at my breast.

"And a law for fratricides," he said, quietly.

I laughed so disdainfully that he forgot himself on the instant in a wild burst of fury.

"Toad! Filthy, poisonous viper!" he yelled. "You think to combat me with your pitiful little sword of brass! Have I overlooked your insolence, d'ye think? Speak a word further—one word, you pestilent dog, and I'll smash you, body and soul, as I smash this glass!"

In his rabid frenzy he actually seized and threw upon the floor the tumbler from which he had lately been drinking, and, putting his heavy heel on it, crushed it into a thousand fragments.

"Oh!" he moaned, his breath chattering like a dry leaf in the wind, "I'll be even with you, my friend—I'll be even with you! You dare—you dare—you dare! You, the poor dependent on my bounty, whom I could wither with a word. The law you call upon so glibly has a long arm for murderers. You think a little lapse of years has made you safe"—he laughed wildly—"safe? Holy saints in heaven! I've only to step over to the police station—five minutes—and you're laid by the heels and a pretty collar weaving for your neck."

He checked himself in the torrent of his rage and lifted his hand menacingly.

"Harkee!" he cried. "I can do that and at a word I would! Now, d'ye set your little tin plate against my bludgeon?"

"Yes," I said.

He seemed to doubt my answer, as if his ears had misinterpreted it, for he went on:

"If you value your life keep out of my way. Take the

lesson from your father. He knew what I could do if I chose; and he took the best means in his power to buy my silence."

I gave a cry of fierce triumph.

"So—the secret is out! It was to save me, as he thought, that my father parted with his treasure!"

The blackmailer gave no answer.

I went and stood close up against him, daring him with the manliness he lacked.

"You are a contemptible, dastardly poltroon," I said, with all the coldest scorn I could muster.

He started back a little.

"If I had killed my brother in good reality, I would go to my hanging with joy if the only alternative were buying my safety from such a slimy, crawling reptile as you!"

"If?" he echoed, with a pale effort at another laugh.

"If was what I said. Pretty doctor you, not to know, as I have since found out, that the boy died by other means than drowning!"

In an ungovernable burst of fury I took him by the throat and drove him back against the table—and he offered no resistance.

"You dog!" I cried. "Oh, you dog, you dog! You did know it, of course, and you had the devil's heart to lie to my father and beat him down in the dust for your own filthy ends! Had I a hand in my brother's death? You know I had not any more than you—perhaps not so much!"

On the snap of the thought I spurned him from me and staggered back.

"Why," I cried, staring at him standing cowering and sullen before me. "Had you, if the truth were known? You were in the house that night!"

He choked once or twice and, smoothing down the apple in his throat with a nervous hand, came out of his corner a pace or two.

"You can put two and two together," he said in a shrill voice, defiant still, but with a whining ring in it.

"What interest could I possibly have in murdering your brother? For the rest—you may be right."

"And you can say it and plume yourself upon having successfully traded on the lie?"

"Yes," he said, with a recovering grin, "I think I can."

I turned from him, sick at his mere presence.

"And now," said he, "I intend to trade upon the truth."

I forced myself to face round upon him again. "The boy," he said, looking down hatefully and shifting some papers on the table with his finger-tips, "it was obvious to any but the merest ignoramus, never died of drowning."

"How then?"

"From the appearances—of strangulation, I should say."

"Strangulation? Who——"

"Do you want these trifles back? Ask your father first why he had Modred's braces in his pocket the morning after? He was very drunk that night—furiously drunk; and he left me alone in the parlor for awhile."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

I VISIT A GRAVE.

All that night I tossed and tossed, in vain effort to court the sleep that should quench the fever in my racked and bewildered brain. My errand had been a failure. In every sense but the purely personal, it had been a failure. And now, indeed, that personal side was the one that least concerned me. As to every other soul in whom I was interested, it seemed that a single false step on my part might lead to the destruction of any one of them. Where could I look for the least comfort or assistance?

My father had glanced anxiously at me when I returned the evening before.

"It has been as you prophesied," I said. "The man is a devil."

He gave a heavy sigh and drooped his head.

"What did he tell you?" he muttered.

"He told me lies, father, I feel sure. But he is too cunning a villain to play without a second card up his sleeve."

The old man raised imploring eyes to my face.

"Dad!" I cried, "is it true you have bought his silence all these years for my sake?"

At that he rose to his feet suddenly.

"No word of that!" he shrieked; "not a word! I can't bear it!"

I looked at him with my throat swelling.

"I'll not refer to it, if you wish it," I said, gently.

"I do wish it. What does it amount to? How could I do less?"

"Very well, dad. I'll keep my gratitude in my heart."

"Gratitude!" He seemed greatly excited. His voice was broken with emotion. "Gratitude to me? For what? For driving you from home? For dealing out your inheritance piecemeal to that hungry vulture yonder? You kill me with your cruelty."

"Father!" I cried, amazed.

"No, no, Renalt! You don't mean to be! But you mustn't talk of it—you mustn't! It's a long knife in my soul—every word! The one thing I might have done for you—I failed in. The wild girl, Renalt; that you loved—oh! A little more watchfulness on my part, a little less selfishness, might have saved her for you!"

He broke down a moment; then went on with a rough sob: "You think I love you, and I want you to think it; but—if you only knew all."

"I know enough. I hold you nothing to blame in all you have referred to."

He waved me from him, entreating me to leave him alone awhile, and he was so unstrung that I thought it best to comply.

But now a new ghost shook my very soul in its walking, and it was the specter of the blackmailer's raising.

Was it possible—was it possible that my father that night—in some fit of drunken savagery—

I put the thought from me, with loathing, but it returned again and again.

One fair morning it occurred to me to go and look upon the grave I had never yet visited. Perhaps, I thought, I should find inspiration there. This vengeful, bewildered pursuit—I did not know how long I should be able to endure it. Sometimes, reviewing the latter, I felt as if it would be best to abandon the chase right then; to yield the chimera to fate to resolve as she might judge fit or never to resolve at all, perhaps. Then the thought that only by running to earth the guilty could I vindicate the innocent, would steel me more rigidly than ever in the old determination.

The ancient church, in the yard of which Modred was buried, stands no great distance away upon a slope of the steep hill that shuts in the east quarter of Winton.

As I passed from the road through the little gate in the yard boundaries a garden of green was about me—an acre of tree and shrub and grass set thickly with flowering barrows and tombstones wrapped in lichen, like velvet for the royal dead. The old church stood in the midst, as quiet and staid and peaceful there in its bower as if no restless life of a loud city hummed and echoed all about it.

I paused in indecision. For the first time it occurred to me that I had made no inquiry as to the position of my brother's grave; that I did not even know if the site of his resting-place was marked by stone or other humbler monument. While I stood the sound of a voice cheerily singing came to me from the further side of a laurel bush that stood up from the grass a rood away. I walked round it and came plump upon my philosophical friend of the "weirs," knee-deep in a grave that he was lustily excavating.

"Hullo," I said, and "Hullo," he answered.

"You seem to find your task a pleasant one?" said I.

"Ah!" he said. "What makes 'ee think thart, now?"

He leaned upon his spade and criticised me.

"You sing at it, don't you?"

"Mebbe I do. Men sing sometimes, I've heard, when they've got the horrors on 'em."

"Have you got the horrors, then?"

"Not in the sense o' drink, though mayhap I've had them, too, in my time."

He lifted his cap to scratch his forehead and resumed his former position.

"Look'ee here," he said. "I stand in a grave, I do. I've dug two fut down. He could wake to a whisper so be as you laid him there. Did he lift his arm, his fingers 'ud claw in the air like a forked rardish. I go a fut deeper—and he'd struggle to bust himself out, and, not succeeding, there'd be a little swelling in the soil above there cracked like the top of a loaf. I go another fut, and he's safe to lie, but he'd hear arnything louder than a bart's whistle yet. At two yard he'll rot as straight and dumb as a dead arder."

"What then?" I said.

"What then? Why, this: Digging here, week in, week out, I thinks to myself, what if they buried me six feet deep some day before the life was out o' me."

"Why should they?"

"Why shouldn't they? Men have been buried quick before now, and why not me?"

I laughed, but looking at him, I noticed that his forehead was wet with beads of perspiration not called forth by his labor.

"How long have you been digging graves?" I asked in a matter of way to help him recover his self-possession.

"Six year come Martlemas."

He resumed his work for awhile and I stood watching him and pondering. Presently I said: "You buried my brother, then?"

"Ay," he answered, heaving out a big clod of earth with an effort, so strained that it seemed to twist his face into a sort of leering grin.

"I was ill when my brother died," I said, "and have lived since in London. I don't know where he lies. Show me and I'll give you the price of a drink."

He jumped out of the pit with alacrity and flung his

coat over his shoulders, tying the dangling arms across his breast.

"Thart's easy arned," he cried, hilariously. "Come along," and he clumped off across the grass.

"See there!" he said, suddenly, stopping me and pointed to a mangy and neglected mound that lay under a corner of the yard wall.

"Is that it?"

He looked at me a moment before he answered. Through all his heartiness there was a queer suggestion of craft in the fellow's face that puzzled me.

"It might be for its state," he said, "but it isn't. You may as soon grow beans in snow as grass on a murdered marn's grave."

"Does a murdered man lie there?"

"Ay. A matter of ten year ago, it may be. He wur found one summer morn in a ditch by the battery yon, and his skull split wi' a billhook. Nubboddy to this day knows his name or him as did it."

A grim tragedy to end in this quiet garden of death. We moved on again, not so far, and my guide pointed down.

"There he lies," he said.

A poor shallow little heap of rough soil grown compact with years. A few blades of rank grass standing up from it, starved and stiff like the bristles on a hog's back. All around the barrows stretched green and kindly. Only here and on that other were sordid desolation. No stone, no boards, no long-lifeless flower even to emphasize the irony of an epitaph. Nothing but entire indifference and the withering footmark of time.

"I mind the day," said the sexton. "Looking ower the hedge yon I see Vokes' pig running, wi' a straw in's mouth. 'We shall have rain,' says I, and rain it did wi' a will. Three o' them came wi' the coffin—the old marn and a young 'un—him 'ud be your brother now—and the long doctor fro' Chis'll. In the arternoon, as I was garthering up my tools, the old marn come back by hissself and chucked a sprig o' verv'n on the mound. 'Oho,' thinks I. 'That'll be to keep the devil fro' walking.' The

storm druv up while he wur starnding there and sent him scuttling. I tuk shelter i' the church, and when I come out by and by, there wur the witch-weed gone—washed fro' the grave, you'll say, and I'll not contradict ye; but the devil knows his own."

"What do you mean?"

He turned and spat behind him before answering.

"He died o' cold i' the inside, eh?"

"Something of that sort. The doctor's certificate said so."

"Ah!" He took off his cap again and rubbed his hot head all over with a whisp of handkerchief. "Supposing he'd been laid two fut and no more—it wur a smarl matter arter the rain to bust the lid and stick his fingers through."

"A small matter, perhaps, for a living man."

He glanced sidelong at me, then gingerly pecked at the mound with his foot.

"No grass'll ever grow there," said he.

"That remains to be seen."

I took a sixpence from my pocket and held it out to him.

"Look here," I said. "Take this, and I'll give you one every week if you'll do your best to make and keep it like—like the other graves."

He put out his hand instinctively, but withdrew it empty.

"No, no," he said; "it's no marnar o' good."

"Try."

"I'd rather not. Good-morning to ye," and he turned his back on me and walked straight off, with his shoulders hunched up to his ears.

I watched his going moodily, but with no great surprise. It was small matter for wonder that Modred's death should have roused uncanny suspicions among the ignorant and superstitious who knew of us. The mystery that overhung our whole manner of life was sufficient to account for that.

For long after the sexton had resumed his work—so long, indeed, that when I rose to go, only his head and

shoulders bobbed up and down above the rim of the pit he was digging—I sat on the grass beside that poor sterile mound and sought inspiration of it.

But no voice spoke to me from its depths.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ONE SAD VISITOR.

The autumn of that year broke upon us with sobbing winds and wild, wet gusts of tempest laden with flying leaves. In the choked trenches, drowned grasses swayed and swung like torn skirt fringes of the meadows; in the woods, drenched leaves clung together and talked, through the lulls, of the devastation that was wrecking their aftermath of glory.

It had been blowing in soft, irresistible onrushes all one dank October day, and all day had I spent in the high woods that crown the gentle hills three or four miles to the southwest of the city. The air in the long, quiet glades was mystic with the smell of decay; the heels of vanishing forms seemed to twinkle from tangled bends of undergrowth as I approached them. Then often, in going by a spot I could have thought lately tenanted, a sense would tingle through me as of something listening behind some aged trunk that stood back from my path.

Gradually dark shut in, and I must needs thread my way among the trees, while some little show of light remained, if I did not wish to be belated in the dense thickets. It would not have troubled me greatly had this actually happened. To yield my tired limbs and wearier soul to some bed of moss set in the heart of an antique wood seemed a blessed and most restful thing to do. But the old man awaited me at home, and thither my duty must carry me.

I had traversed a darkling alley of leafage, treading noiseless on the spongy floor of it, and was coming out into a little lap of tree-inclosed lawn that it led to when

I stopped in a moment and drew myself back with a start.

Something was there before me—a fantastic moving shape, that footed the grass in a weird, sinuous dance of intricate paces, and waving arms, and feet that hardly rustled on the dead leaves. It was all wild, elfin; ineffably strange and unearthly. I felt as if the dead past were revealed to me, and that here I might lay down my burden and yield the poor residue of life to one last ecstasy.

Dipping, swaying; now here, now there, about the dusky plat of lawn; sometimes motionless for an instant, so that its drooping skirts and long, loosened hair made but one tree-like figure of it; again whirling into motion, with its dark tresses flung abroad—the figure circled round to within a yard of where I was standing.

Then in a loud, tremulous tone I cried “Zyp!” and sprung into the open.

She gave a shriek, craned her neck forward to gaze at me, and, falling upon her knees at my feet, clasped her arms about me.

For a full minute we must have remained thus; and I heard nothing but the breathless panting of the girl.

“Zyp,” I whispered at last, “what are you doing here, in the name of heaven?”

“I wanted to see you, Renny. I have walked all the way from Southampton. Night came upon me as I was passing through the wood—and—and I couldn’t help it—I couldn’t help it.”

“This mad dancing?”

“I’m so unhappy. Renny, poor Zyp is so unhappy!”

“Does this look like it?”

“The elves caught me. It was so lovely to shake off all the weight and the misery and the womanliness.”

“Are you tired of being a woman, Zyp?”

“Tired? My heart aches so that I could die. Oh, I hate it all! No, no, Renny, don’t believe me! My little child! My little, little child! How can I have her and not be a woman!”

“Get up, Zyp, and let’s find our way out of this.”

"Not till you've promised me. Where can we talk better? The foolish people never dare to walk here at night. You love the woods, too, Renny. Oh, why didn't I wait for you? Why, why didn't I wait for you?"

"Come, we must go."

"Not till you've promised to help me."

"I promise."

She caught my hand and kissed it as she knelt; then rose to her feet and her dark eyes burned upon me in the gloom.

"You didn't expect to see me?"

"How could I? Least of all here."

"It's on the road from Southampton. At least, if it isn't, the woods drew me and I couldn't help but go."

"Why have you come from Southampton?"

"We fled there to escape him."

"Him? Who?" Yet I had no need to ask.

"That horrible man. Oh, his white face and the eyes in it! Renny, I think Jason will die of that face."

I remembered Duke's words and was silent.

"It comes upon us in all places and at all hours. Wherever we go he finds means to track us and to follow—in the streets; in churches, where we sometimes sit now; at windows, staring in and never moving. Renny," she came close up against me to whisper in my ear, and put her arm round my neck like the Zyp of old. Perhaps she was half-changeling again in that atmosphere of woodland leafiness. "Renny—once he tried to poison Jason!"

"Oh, Zyp, don't say that!"

"He did—he did. Jason was sitting by an open window in the dark, and a tumbler of spirit and water was on the table by him. He was leaning back in his chair, as if asleep, but he was really looking all the time from under his eyelids. A hand came very gently through the window, pinched something into the glass, and went away again quite softly."

"Why didn't Jason seize it—call out—do anything that wasn't abject and contemptible?"

"You don't know how the long strain has told upon him. Sometimes in the beginning he thought he must

face it out, for life or death, and end the struggle. But he isn't really brave, I think."

"No, Zyp, he isn't."

"And now it has gone too far. All his spirit is broken. He clings to me like a child. He sits with his hand in mine, staring and listening and dreadfully waiting. And that other doesn't mean to kill him now, I think—not murder him, I mean. He sees he can do it more hideously by following—by only following and looking, Renny."

In a moment she bowed her head upon my arm and burst into a convulsive flood of crying. I waited for the first of it to subside before I spoke again. These, almost the only tears I had ever known fall from her, were eloquent of her change, indeed.

"Oh!" she cried, presently, in a broken voice. "He didn't treat me well at first—my husband—but this piteous clinging to me now—something chokes—" she flung her head back from me and wrenched with her hands at the bosom of her dress, as if the heart underneath were swollen to breaking. Then she tossed up her arms and, drooping her head, once more fell to a passion of weeping.

"Zyp," I said, quietly, when she could hear me, "what is it you want me to do?"

"We want money, Renny—" she gasped, still with fluttering sobs, drying her eyes half-fiercely as if in resentment of that brief self-abandonment. "He has no spirit to make it now as he used. We have escaped to Southampton, intending to go abroad somewhere, and lose ourselves and be lost. We fled in a fright, unthinking, and now we can get no further. You'll help us, Renny, won't you?"

"I'll help you, Zyp, now and always, if you need it—always, as far as it is possible for me to."

"We don't want much—enough to get away, that's all. If he could only be free a little while, I think perhaps he might recover partly and be strong to seek for work."

"It will take me a day or two."

"So long? Oh, Renny!"

"I must go to London to raise it. I can't possibly manage it otherwise."

She gave a heavy forlorn sigh.

"I hope it won't come too late?"

"You can trust me, dear, not to delay a minute longer over it than is absolutely necessary."

"You are the only one I can always trust," she said, with a little, wan, melancholy smile.

A sleek shine of moonlight was spreading so that I could see her face turned up to me.

"You will come on to the mill, Zyp?"

"Not now; it is useless. I hear my baby calling, Renny."

"But—what will you do?"

"Walk back to Southampton."

"To-night?"

"Part of the way, at least. When I get tired I shall sleep."

"Sleep? Where?"

"Under some tree or bush. Where could I better?"

"Zyp! You mustn't. Anything might happen to you."

Her face took a flash of scorn.

"To me—in the woods or the open fields? You forget who I am, Renny."

No insistence or argument on my part could alter her determination. Return she would, then and there."

"Well," I said at last, hopeless of shaking her, "how shall I convey the money to you?"

"Jason shall come and fetch it."

"Jason?"

"Yes. I can't leave the child again. Besides, it will be better for him to move and act than sit still always watching and waiting."

"Very well, then. Let him come when he likes. Tomorrow I will get the money."

She came and took my hand and looked up in my face. "Good-by, you good man," she said. "Give me one kiss, Renny."

I stooped and touched her cheek with my lips.

"That is for the baby," I said, "and God bless Zyp and the little one."

She backed from me a pace or two, with her dark eyes dreaming.

"Did you think I could ever be like this, Renny? I wonder if they will turn to me as they used?"

She dropped upon her knees before a little plant of yellow woundwort that grew beside a tree. She caressed it, she murmured to it, she gave it a dozen fond names in the strangest of elfin language. It did not stir. It remained just a quiet, drowsy woodland thing.

"Ah!" she cried, leaping to her feet, "it's jealous of the baby. What do I care?" She gave it a little slap with her hand. "Wake up, you sulky thing!" she cried—"I'm going to tell you something. There's no flower like my baby in all the world!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

I GO TO LONDON.

I walked home that night in a dream. The white road lay a long, luminous ribbon before me; the wet hedges were fragrant with scented mist; there was only the sound in my ears of my own quick breathing, but in my heart the echo of the sweet wild voice that had but now so thrilled and tortured me.

I thought of her swerving presently from her dreary road southward, to sleep under some bush or briar, fearless in her beauty—fearless in her confidence of the rich nature about her that was so much her own. She seemed a thing apart from the world's evil; a queenliest queen of fancy, that had but to summon her good fellows if threatened.

"Sweet safety go with you, my fairy!" I cried, and, crying, stumbled over a poor doe rabbit sitting in the road, with glazing eyes and the stab of the ferret tooth behind her ear.

"Zyp! Zyp!" I muttered, gazing sorrowfully on the dying bunny, "are you as much earth, after all, as this poor hunted brute? Ah, never, never let your kinsfolk strike you through your motherhood."

I found my father sitting up for me amid the gusty lights and shadows of the old mill sitting-room. He welcomed me with a joy that filled my heart with remorse at having left him so long alone.

"Dad," I said, "I have seen Zyp!"

He only looked at me in wonder.

"She was coming to implore my help to enable her and—and her husband to escape—to get away abroad somewhere."

"Escape? From what?"

"That man—my one-time friend—that I told you about. He has pursued them all the year with deadly hatred. Jason is half-mad with terror of him, it seems."

My father's face darkened.

"He summoned his own Nemesis," he said. "What do they want—money?"

"Yes. I promised her what I could afford. To-morrow I must run up to London to raise it."

"On what security?"

"A mortgage, I suppose. I have some small investments in house property."

He mused a little while.

"It is better," he said, by and by, "to leave all that intact. We must part with another coin or so, Renalt."

"If you think it best, father. I wouldn't for my soul go back from my promise."

"Will you take them up and negotiate the business? I grow feeble for these journeys."

"Of course I will, if you'll give me the necessary instructions."

He nodded.

"I'll have them ready for you to-morrow," he said.

Then for a long time he sat gazing gloomily on the floor.

"Where are they?" he said, suddenly.

"Zyp and Jason? At Southampton. She walked from

there, and I met her in the woods, she would come no further, but started on her way back again."

"How are you going to get the stuff to them, then?"

"Jason is coming here to fetch it."

He rose from his chair, with startled eyes.

"Here? Coming here?" he cried. "Renalt! Don't bring him—don't let him!"

"Father!"

"He's a bad fellow—a wicked son! He'll drain us of all! What the doctor's left he'll take! Don't let him come!"

He spoke wildly—imploringly. He held out his hands, kneading the fingers together in an agony of emotion.

"Dad!" I said. "Don't go on so! You're overwrought with fancies. How can he possibly help himself to more than we decide to give him? Try to pull yourself together—to be your old strong self."

"Oh!" he moaned, "I do try, but you know so little. He's a brazen, heartless wretch! We shall die paupers."

His voice rose into a sort of shriek.

"Come!" I said, firmly, "you must command yourself. This is weak to a degree. Remember, I am with you, to look after your interests—your peace—to defend you if necessary."

He only moaned again: "You don't know."

"I know this," I said, "that by Zyp's showing my brother is a broken man—helpless, demoralized—in a pitiable state altogether."

He seemed to prick his ears somewhat at that.

"If he must come," he said, "if he must come, watch him—grind him under—never let him think for an instant that he keeps the mastery."

"He shall never have cause to claim that, father."

He spoke no more, but crept to his room presently and left me pondering his words far into the night.

Later on, as I lay awake in bed, I heard his room door open softly and the sound of his footsteps on the stairs. This, however, being no unfamiliar experience with us, disturbed me not at all.

In the morning at breakfast he handed me a couple of ancient gold coins.

"Take these," he said; "they should bring £5 apiece."

His instructions as to the disposal of the relics I need not dwell upon. Their consignee, a highly respectable tradesman in his line, would no doubt consider any mention of his name a considerable breach of confidence. I had my own opinion as to the laws of treasure-trove, and he may have had his as to my father. When, armed with my father's warranty, I visited this amiable "receiver," I found him to be an austere-looking but pleasant gentleman, with an evident enthusiasm for the scholarly side of his business. He gave me the price my father had mentioned, and bowed me to the door, with a faint blush.

It was so early in the day by the time I had finished my business that, deeming it not possible that Jason could reach the mill before the evening at earliest, I determined upon returning by an afternoon train, that I might make a visit that had been in my mind since I first knew I was to revisit London. It was to a dull and lonely cemetery out Battersea way, where a poor working girl lay at rest.

It was late in the afternoon when I came to the lodge gate of the burial-place and inquired there as to the position of the grave.

Indeed, in the quarter where I found her the graves lay so close that it seemed almost as if the coffins must touch underground.

My eyes filled with humble tears as I stood looking down on the thin green mound. A little cross of stone stood at the head and on it "D. M." and the date of her death. The grave had been carefully tended—lovingly trimmed and weeded and coaxed to the greenest growth in those nine short months. A little bush rose stood at the foot, and on the breast of the hillock, a bunch of rich, fading flowers lay. They must have been placed there within the last two or three days only—by the same hands that had gardened the sprouting turf—that had raised the simple cross and written thereon the date of a great heart's breaking.

I placed my own sad token of autumn flowers nearer the foot of the mound, and, going to the cross, bent and kissed it. My eyes were so blinded, my throat so strangled, that for the moment I felt as if, as I did so, it put its arms about my neck and that Dolly's soft cheek was laid against mine. I know that I rose peaceful with the assurance of pardon; and that, by and by, that gentle, unresting spirit was to extend to me once more, in the passing of a dreadful peril, the saving beneficence of its presence.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A FACE.

Dark was falling as on my return I came within sound of the mill race. I thought I could make out a little group of people leaning over the stone balustrade of the bridge as I approached. Such I found to be the case, and among them Dr. Crackenthorpe standing up gaunt in his long brown coat.

I was turning in at the yard, when this individual hailed me, and by doing so brought all the faces round in my direction. I walked up to him.

"Well?" I said.

"These good folk are curious. It's no affair of mine, but half a minute ago there came a yell out of the old cabin yonder fit to wake the dead."

"Well?" I said, again, with a mighty assumption of coolness I hardly felt.

"Oh, don't suppose I care. It only seemed to me that some day, perhaps, you'll have the place stoned about your ears, if you don't let a little more light in."

A murmur went up from the half-dozen rustics and brainless idlers.

"We don't warnt no drownding ghosteses in Winton," said a voice.

I went straight up to them.

"Don't you?" I said. "Then you'd best keep out of

reach of them that can make you that and something worse. I suppose some of you have cried out with the lumbago before now?"

"That warn't no lumbago cry, master."

"Wasn't it, now? Have you ever had it?"

"No—I harsn't."

"I'll give you a good imitation"—and I made a rush at the fellow who spoke. The crowd scattered, and the man, suddenly backing, toppled over with a crack that brought a yell out of him.

"See there!" I cried. "You scream before you are touched even. A pretty fool you, to gauge the meaning of any noise but your own gobbling over a slice of bread and bacon."

This was to the humor of the others, who cackled hoarsely with laughter.

"If you want to ask questions," I said, turning upon them, "put them to this doctor here, who sits every day in a room with a row of murderers' heads looking down upon him."

With that I walked off in a heat, and was going toward the house, when Dr. Crackenthorne came after me with a stride and a furious menace.

"You'll turn the tables, will you?" he said, in a suffocating voice. "Some day, my friend—some day!"

I didn't answer him or even look his way, but strode into the mill and banged the door in his face.

As I entered our sitting-room, I found Jason standing motionless in the shadow a few feet from my father's chair.

The old man welcomed me with an agonized cry of rapture, and endeavored to struggle to his feet, but dropped back again as if exhausted. I went and stood over him, and he clung to one of my hands, as a drowning man might.

"Who cried out just now?" I asked, fiercely, of Jason.

He gulped and cleared his throat, but could only point nervelessly at the cowering figure before him.

"Father! What is the matter?"

"You wouldn't come, Renalt—you wouldn't come! I prayed for you to come."

"What has he been doing?"

"It was all the old horror over again. Send him away! Don't let him come near me!"

I was falling distracted. I turned to Jason once more.

"Come! Out with it!" I said. "What have you been doing?"

He strove to smile. His face was ghastly—pinched and lined.

"Nothing," he said at last, with a choking cluck in his throat. "I have done nothing."

"Don't believe him," moaned my father. "He wanted all; he wanted to sink me to ruin."

"I wanted to ruin nobody!" cried my brother, finding his voice in a wail of despair. "I'm desperate, that's all—desperate to escape—and he offers me little more than he'd give to a beggar."

"I tell him I'm not far from one myself! He won't believe it. He threatened me, Renalt. He brought the hideous time back again."

A light broke upon me, as from a furnace door snapped open.

"Dad," I said, gently, "will you go to your room and leave the rest to me?"

I helped him to his feet—across the room. His eyes watched the other all the time. It was pitiful to see his terror of him.

Jason stood where he had planted himself, waiting my return with hanging head and fingers laced in front of him.

I led the old man to the foot of the stairs. Then I returned to the room and stood before my brother.

"I understand it all now," I said, in a straight, quiet voice. "The 'some one else' you suspected, or pretended to, was our father!"

No answer.

"While I was in London you traded upon this pretended knowledge to force money out of the old man."

No answer.

"Your silence will do. What can I say but that it was like you? To traffic upon a helpless man's miserable apprehensions for your own sordid ends—and that man your father! To do this while holding a like threat over another's head—your brother's—still for your own pitiful ends. And all the time who knows but you may be the murderer?"

"I am not the murderer. You persist, and—and it's too cruel."

"Cruel! To you? Who killed Modred?"

"I believe it was dad."

"I believe upon my soul it's a lie!"

"He thinks it himself, anyhow."

"Is it any good saying to you that a man of his habits, as he was then, might be driven to believe anything of himself?"

"Why did he have the braces in his pocket, then?"

"He had carried the boy up-stairs—you know that. He had been bathing and his things were scattered."

"It isn't all. Modred had discovered his secret."

In spite of myself I started.

"What secret?" I said.

"Where the coins were hidden."

"What coins?"

For the first time he looked at me with a faint leer of cunning.

"I won't condescend to prevaricate for any purpose," I said. "I do know about the treasure, because he told me himself, but I swear I know to this day nothing about its hiding-place."

He looked at me curiously.

"Well," he said, "Modred had found it out, anyway."

"How do you know?"

"Didn't he offer to give Zyp something in exchange for a kiss that night we watched them out of the window?"

"Go on."

"It was gold. I saw it. He must have found his way to the store and stolen it. Mayn't it be, now, that dad

discovered he had been robbed, and took the surest way to prevent it happening again?"

"No—a thousand times!" I spoke stanchly, but my heart felt sick within me.

He was silent.

"So," I said, in a high-strung voice, "this was your manner of business during my absence; that the way to the means that helped you up to London? A miserable discovery for you—for I gather from your words you, too, found out about the hiding-place. You had better have left it alone—a million times you had better."

Still he was silent.

"Did Zyp know, too?"

"No—not from my telling. I can't answer for what she may have found out for herself. She sees in the dark."

"How much did you have, from first to last? But I suppose you helped yourself whenever you needed it?"

"I didn't—I swear I didn't! I never put finger on the stuff till dad handed it over to me. What right had he to keep us without a penny all those years, when riches were there for the taking?"

"He could do what he liked with his own, I conclude. At any rate, the end justified the means. A pretty use you made of your vile extortion—a bloody vengeance is the price you pay for it!"

At that he gave a sudden cry.

"I'm lost—I know it! Help me to escape. Renny, help me to escape."

"Do you think you deserve that of me, Jason?"

He dropped upon his knees, an abject, wailing figure.

"I don't—I don't! But you're generous—Renalt, I always thought you good and generous, when I laughed at you most. Save me from that terror! He strikes at me in the dark—I never know where his hideous face will show next. He follows me—haunts me—tries to poison me, to torture me to death! Oh, Renny, help me!"

"Answer me truly first. For how long were you robbing the old man?"

"I may have had small sums of him for a year—nothing

much. When Zyp and I made up our minds to go, I bid for a larger, and he gave it me."

"He didn't know you were married?"

"He wouldn't hear of it—it's the truth. He meant her for you, I think, and the worst threats I could use never shook him from his refusal to countenance us."

"Brave old man!"

"Renny—help me!"

"For Zyp's sake," I said, sternly—"yes. Were it not for her appeal, I tell you plainly you might perish for me."

He looked so base kneeling there in his craven degradation that I could not forbear the stroke.

"My father provides the means," I said. "I went to London to-day to realize it. Here it is, and make the most of it."

He took it from me with trembling hands.

"Ten pounds," he said, blankly. "No more?"

"Isn't it enough?"

"Enough to get away with, not enough to find a living on across the water."

"It's all you'll get—that's final. Remember now that I stand here by my father. Always remember that when your fingers itch for hush money—and remember who it was that was once my friend."

He rose and crept to the door with bowed head. Some old vein of tenderer feeling gushed warm in me.

"Jason," I cried, "I forgive you for all you have done to me."

He turned and came back to me, seized me by the wrist—and his eyes were moist with tears.

"For pity's sake come a little way with me, Renny. You don't know what I suffer."

"A little way on your road, do you mean?"

"Yes. I daren't go by train. He might be there. I must walk; and I dread—Renny, supposing I should meet him on the way?"

"Why, that's nonsense. Haven't you just come alone?"

"I was driven by the thought of what I was seeking, then. It was bad enough. But, now I've got it, all

nerve seems shaken out of me. I'm afraid of the dark."

Was this the stuff that villains are made of? Almost I could find it in me to soothe and comfort the poor, terrified creature.

"Very well," I said. "I will walk part of the way with you."

His wan cheek flushed with gratitude. I got my hat and stick, and ran up to my father to tell him whither I was off.

As I came downstairs again Jason was disappearing into the loft, where the stones were, that stood opposite the sitting-room. The wheel underneath was booming as usual and the great disks revolved softly with a rubbing noise. I saw him go to the dim window, that stood out as if hung up in the black atmosphere of the room, a square of latticed gray. It was evidently his intention to reconnoiter before starting, for the window looked upon the bridge and the now lonely tail of the High street.

Suddenly a sort of stifled rushing noise issued from his lips, and he stole back on tiptoe to the passage without the room. There, in the weak lamplight, he fell against the wall, and his face was the color of straw paper and his lips were ashen.

"He's there," he said, in a dreadful whisper. "He's standing on the bridge waiting for me."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A NIGHT PURSUIT.

I rushed across the room and looked out through the dim glass. At first I could make out nothing until a faint form resolved itself suddenly into a face, gray and set as the block of stone it looked over.

It never moved, but remained thus as if it were a sculptured death designed to take stock forever with a petrified stare of the crumbling mill.

Then, as my eyes grew accustomed to the outlines, I saw that it leaned down in reality, with its chin resting on its hands that were crossed over the top of the parapet. Even at that distance I should have known the mouth, though the whole pose of the figure were not visible to convince me.

Jason looked at me like a dying man when I returned to him. The full horror of a mortal fright, than which nothing is more painful to witness, spoke from his lungs, that heaved as if the sweet air had become a palpable thing to enter within and imprison his soul from all hope of escape. He tried to question me, but only sunk back with a moan.

"Now," I said, "you must summon all your resolution. Act promptly and in half an hour you will be beyond reach of him."

My own nerves were strung to devouring action. A kind of exultation fired me to master this tyranny of pursuit. Whatever might be its justification, the tactics of aggressive force should at least be open and human, I thought.

"You don't want to pass the night here?"

He made a negative motion with his head.

"I think you're right. It might only be postponing the end. Will you place yourself in my hands?"

He held out his arms to me imploringly.

"Very well. Now, listen to me. There he will remain in all likelihood for some time, not knowing he is discovered. We must give him the slip—escape quietly at the back, while he is intent on the front."

I could only make out that his white lips whispered: "You won't leave me?"

"Not till all danger is past. I promise you."

I went over the house and quietly tested that every bolt and catch was secure. Then I fetched a dram of spirit, and made the poor, demoralized wretch swallow it. It brought a glint of color to his cheek—a little firmness to his limbs.

"Another," he whispered.

"No," I answered. "You want the nerve to act; not the overconfidence that leads to a false step. Come."

Together we stole to the rear of the building where the little platform hung above the race. I locked the door behind us and pocketed the key.

"Now," I said, "quietly and no hesitating. Follow me."

The stream here sought passage between the inclosed mill-head, with its tumbling bay and waste weir—the sluice of which I never remember to have seen shut—on the one side, and on the other the wall of an adjoining garden. This last was not lofty, but was too high to scale without fear of noise and the risk of attracting observation. Underneath the heavy pull of the water would have spun us like straws off our feet had we dropped into it there.

There was only one way, and that I had calculated upon. To the left some branches of a great sycamore tree overhung the wall, the nearest of them some five feet out of reach. Climbing the rail of the platform, I stood upon the outer edge and balanced myself for a spring. It was no difficult task to an active man, and in a moment I was bobbing and dipping above the black onrush of the water. Pointing out my feet with a vigorous oscillating action, I next swung myself to a further branch, which I clutched, letting go the other. Here I dangled above a little silt of weed and gravel that stood forth the margin of the stream, and onto it I dropped, finding firm foothold, and motioned to Jason to follow.

He was like to have come to grief at the outset, for from his nerves being shaky, I suppose, he sprang short of the first branch, hitting at it frantically with his fingers only, so that he fell with a bounding splash into the water's edge. The pull had him in an instant, and it would have been all up with him had I not foreseen the result while he was yet in midair and plunged for him. Luckily I still held on to the end of the second branch, to which I clung with one hand, while I seized his coat collar with the other. For half a minute even then it was a struggle for life or death, the stout wood I held

to deciding the balance, but at last he gained his feet, and I was able to pull him, wallowing and stumbling, toward me. It was not the depth of the water that so nearly overcame us, for it ran hardly above his knees. It was the mighty strength of it rushing onward to the wheel.

He would have paused to regain his breath, but I allowed him no respite.

"Hurry!" I whispered. "Who knows but he may have heard the splash?"

He needed no further stimulus, but pushed at me to proceed, in a flurried agony of fear. I tested the water on the further side of the little mound. It was possible to struggle up against it along its edge, and of that possibility we must make the best. Clutching at the wall with crooked fingers for any hope of support, we moved up, step by step, until gradually the wicked hold slackened and we could make our way without bitter struggle.

Presently, to the right, the wall opened to a slope of desert garden ground that ran up to an empty cottage standing on the fall of the hill above. Over to this we cautiously waded, and climbed once more to dry land, drenched and exhausted.

No pause might be ours yet, however. Stooping almost to the earth, we scurried up the slope, passed the cottage, and never stopped until we stood upon the road that skirts the base of the hill.

A moment's breathing space now and a moment's reflection. Downward the winding road led straight to the bridge and the very figure we were flying. Yet it was necessary to cross the head of this road somehow, to reach the meadows that stretched over the lap of the low valley we must traverse before we could hit the Southampton highway.

Fortunately no moon was up to play traitor to our need. I took my brother by the coat sleeve and led him onward. He was trembling and shivering as if with an ague. Over the grass, by way of the watery tracks, we sped—passing at a stone's throw the pool where Modred had nearly met his death, breaking out at last, with a

panting burst of relief, into the solitary stretch of road running southward. Before us, in the glimmering dark, it went silent and lonely between its moth-haunted hedges, and we took it with long strides.

My brother hurried by my side without a word, subduing his breathing even as much as possible and walking with a light, springing motion on his toes; but now and again I saw him look back over his shoulder, with an awful expression of listening.

It was after one of his turns that Jason suddenly whipped a hand upon my arm and drew me to a stop.

"Listen!" he whispered, and slewed his head round, with a dry chirp in his throat.

Faintly—very faintly, a step on the road behind us came to my ears.

"He's following!" murmured my brother, with a sort of despairing calmness.

"Nonsense," I said; "how do you know it's he? It's a public highway."

"I do know. Hark to the step!"

It was a little nearer. There was a queer dragging sound in it. Was it possible that some demon inspired this terrible man to an awful species of clairvoyance? How otherwise could he be on our tracks? Unless, indeed, the splash had informed him!

There was a gap in the hedge close by where we stood, and not far from it, in the field beyond, a haystack looming gigantic in the dark. With a rapid motion I dived, pulling Jason after me—and stooping low, we scurried for the shelter, and threw ourselves into the loose stuff lying on the further side of it. There, lying crushed into the litter, with what horror of emotion to one of us God alone may know, we heard the shuffling footsteps come rapidly up the road. As it neared the gap, my brother's hand fell upon mine, with a convulsive clutch. It was stone cold and all clammy with the ooze of terror. As the footstep passed he relaxed his hold and seemed to collapse. I thought he had fainted, but mercifully I was mistaken.

The step behind the hedge seemed to go a little further,

then die out all at once. I thought he had passed beyond our hearing, and lay still some moments longer listening—listening, through the faint rustling sounds of the night, for assurance of our safety.

At length I was on the point of rising, when a strained hideous screech broke from the figure beside me and I saw him sway up, kneeling, and totter sideways against the wall of hay. With the sound of his voice I sprung to my feet—and there was the pursuer, come silently round the corner of the stack, and gazing with gloating eyes upon his victim.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A STRANGE VIGIL.

Had Jason fainted, as I thought he had, his enemy would have been upon him before I was aware of his presence even. As it was, in an instant I had interposed my body between them.

For a full minute, perhaps, we remained thus, like figures of stone, before I found my voice.

"You can go back," I said, never taking my eyes off him. "It's too late."

He gave no answer, nor did he change his position.

"I won't appeal to you," I said, "by any claim of old friendship, to leave this poor wretch in peace. If common humanity can make no way with you, how shall any words of mine?"

He made a little sidling movement, to which I corresponded with a like.

"You're welcome to measure your strength with mine," I said. "You'll have to do it before you can think to get at him."

He looked at me with glittering eyes, as if debating my power to stop him.

"Duke!" I cried, "be merciful! If his crime was great, he has repented."

He spoke at last, screwing out an ugly high little chuckle, with a straining of his whole body, like a cock crowing.

"Why, so have I!" he said. "There's a place waiting for the two of us among the blessed saints, while she's frying down below."

"It was hers to forgive, and she has forgiven, I know. Be merciful and worthy of her you are to meet some day."

"What can I do more disinterested, then, than send him repentant to sit with her. There's a noble revenge to take! If he'd stopped in London I'd have allowed him a little longer, perhaps; but, as he wants to escape, I must make sure, or the devil might have me by the leg, you see."

All the time we spoke, Jason was cowering among the hay, his breath sounding in quick gasps. Now he gave out a pitiful moan, and Duke bent his head waiting for a repetition, as if it were music to him.

"For the last time, be merciful, Duke."

"Well, so I will."

He spoke looking up at me, with his head still bent sideways, and, in that position, felt in one of his pockets.

"If the gentleman will condescend to take this," he said, standing suddenly erect and holding out a little white paper packet in his hand, "I will go and welcome. But I must see him swallow it first."

"Poison?"

"Not at all. A love potion—nothing more."

Duke stole toward me insidiously, holding out the paper. The moment he was within reach I struck it out of his hand. While my arm was yet in the air, he came with a rush at me—caught his foot in a projecting root—staggered and fell with a sliding thump upon the grass.

"Keep behind!" I shouted to Jason, who was uttering incoherent cries and running to and fro like a thing smitten with a sunstroke. He stopped at sound of my voice; then came and clung to me, feeling me to be his last hope.

For a moment Duke lay as if stunned; then slowly

gathered himself together and rose to his feet—rose only to collapse again, with a snarling curse of agony. He glowered up at us, moaning and muttering, and nursing his injured limb; for so it seemed that, in falling, he had cruelly twisted and sprained one of his ankles.

When the truth broke upon me I turned round upon my brother with a great breath of gratitude and relief.

"Run!" I cried. "You can be miles away before he will be able to move, even."

Jason leaped from me, his eyes staring maniacally.

"You fool!" I cried; "go! Leave him to me! You can be at Southampton before he is out of the field here. Even if he is able to walk by morning, which I doubt, he has me to reckon with!"

Some little nerve came to him, once standing outside the baneful influence of the eyes. He dashed his hand across his forehead, gave me one rapid, wild glance of gratitude and renewed hope, and, turning, ran for his life into the darkness.

As his footsteps clattered faintly down the road I returned to grapple with his enemy.

I almost stumbled over him as I turned the corner. He had rolled and struggled so far in his rabid frenzy; and now, seeing me come back alone, he set up a yell of rage, reviling and cursing me and hurling impotent lightnings of hate after his escaped victim.

Gradually the storm of his passion mouthed itself away and he lay silent on the ground like a dead thing. Then I moved to him; knelt and softly pulled him by the sleeve.

"Duke, shall I bind it up for you?"

"What? My heart?" He spoke with his face in the grass. "Bind it in a sling, you fool—it's a heavy stone—and smite the accursed Philistine on the forehead with it."

"Has this bitter trouble dehumanized you altogether? Do you blame me in this? He was my brother."

"And you were my friend. What is the value of it all? I would have crushed you like a beetle if you stood in my way to him. Deviltry is the only happiness. I think he was beforehand with me in that. What a poor

idiot to let him be! I might have enjoyed a minute's bliss for the price of my soul, and now my only hope of it is by killing him."

"That you shall never do if I can prevent it."

He rolled over on his back, thrust his arms beneath his head and lay staring at me with deeply melancholy eyes.

"Let's cry an armistice for the night," he said, in a low, gentle voice.

"Forever, Duke!"

"Between us two? Why not—on all questions but the one?"

"Find some pity in your heart, even for him."

"Never!" He jerked out an arm and shook it savagely at the sky. "Never!"

I gave a heavy sigh.

"Well," I said, "let's look to your foot, at least."

"Is he beyond my reach?"

"Quite. You can put it out of your head. Even if your limb were sound you'd never catch him now. With the morning they go abroad."

"Where to?"

"Honestly, I don't know."

"You found him the funds?"

"Yes."

He groaned and turned his face away for a moment. I busied myself over his bruised ankle. Presently he said:

"How long am I to lie here?"

"Till I can see to cut you a stick from the hedge. You wouldn't be able to limp a step without one."

"Very well. Will you sit by me?"

"As long as you like."

"I have no likes or dislikes now, Renny, and only one hate."

"We won't talk of that."

"Not now. This field is the neutral ground. Once outside it, the armistice ends."

"Duke!"

"How can it be otherwise, Renny, my old friend? Are you going to back me in the chase? Unless you do,

you must see that it is impossible for us to come together."

"I see nothing—feel nothing, but a vast, interminable sorrow, Duke."

"And I—you have a gentle hand, Renny. So had she. She bound up my wrist for me once, when I had crushed it in the galley-puller. Shall we recall those days?"

My heart swelled to hear him in this softened mood, as I thought. Alas! It was only a brief interval of lucidity in his madness.

"Ah, if we could look beyond!" I finally answered, with a deep sigh.

"We can—we do. Imagination isn't guided by rule of thumb. Even here the promise dawns slowly. Scabs are thickest on the body when it's healing of its fever. They will fall off by and by, for all the dismal shrieks that degeneration has seized us."

He closed his eyes and lay back upon his hands once more.

"Imagination? Was this ever my world? There is a wide green forest, and the murmur of its running brooks is all of faces sweet as flowers and voices that I know, for I heard them long ago in a time before I existed here. And I walk on, free forever of the aching past; the eternity of most beautiful possibilities and discoveries before me; joyous all through but for one sad little longing that encumbers me. Not for long—no, not for long. On a lawn fragrant with loving flowers and gathered here and there to deep silence by the stooping shadows, I come upon her—my love; my dear, dear love. And she kisses the sorrow from my eyes, and holds me to her and whispers, 'You have come at last.'"

His voice broke with a sob. Glancing at him, I saw the tears running down his cheeks. This grief was sacred from word of mine. I rose softly and set to pacing the meadow at a little distance. By and by, when I returned, I saw him sitting up. The mood had passed, but he was still gentle and human.

Till dawn was faint in the sky we sat and talked the dark hours away. The sun had risen and Duke was

watching something in the grass, when suddenly he shook himself and turned to me.

"Cut me my stick, Renny," he said. "The pilgrim must be journeying."

"Come home with me, Duke."

He shook his head.

"Look!" he said, "I have tried to read a lesson of a spider as Bruce did. I broke and tangled the little fellow's web like a wanton and what did he do but roll the rubbish up into a ball and swallow it. I can't get rid of my web in that way, Renny."

I did my utmost to hold him to his softer mind. He would not listen, but drove me from him.

"Cut me my stick," he said, "or I shall have to crawl down the road on all fours."

I did his bidding sadly. Propped up by me on one side, he was able with the help of his staff to limp painfully from the field. Outside it, he sat himself down on the hedge bank.

"Good-morning, Mr. Trender," he said.

"Duke, let me at least help you to the town."

"Not a step, I'm obliged to you. I shall get on very well by and by. Good-morning."

I seized and shook his hand—it dropped listlessly from mine—hesitated; looked in his face, and, turning from him, strode sorrowfully off homeward.

CHAPTER XL.

A STORY AND ITS SEQUEL.

Nine months had passed since my parting with Duke on the hillside, and my life in the interval had flowed on with an easy uneventful monotony that was at least restorative to my turbulent soul. We had not once heard during this stretch of time from Jason or Zyp, and could only conclude that, finding asylum in some remote corner of the world, they would not risk discovery in it by word

or sign. Letters, like homing pigeons, sometimes go astray.

Duke had put in no second appearance. Dr. Cracken-thorpe kept entirely aloof. All the tragedy of that dark period, crushed within a single year of existence, seemed swept by and scattered like so much road dust. Only my father and I remained of the strutting and fretting actors to brood over the parts we had played; and one of us was gray at heart forevermore, and the other waxing halt and old and feeble.

Now, often I tried to put the vexing problem of my brother's death behind me; and yet, if I thought for a moment I had succeeded, it was only to be conscious of a grinning skeleton at my back.

And in this year a strange and tragic thing happened in Winton that was indirectly the cause in me of a fresh fungus growth of doubt and dark suspicion; and it fell out in this wise:

Some twenty years before, when I was a mere child (the story came to me later), a great quarrel had taken place between two citizens of the old burg. They were partners, before the dispute, in a flourishing business, and the one of them who was ultimately worsted in the argument had been the benefactor of the man that triumphed. The quarrel rose on some question as to the terms of their mutual agreement, the partner who had been taken into the firm out of kindness claiming the right to oust the other by a certain date. The technicalities of the matter were involved in a mass of obscurity, but anyhow they went to law about it and the beneficiary won the case. The other was forced to retire, to all intents and purposes a ruined man, but he bore with him a possession that no judge could deprive him of—a deep, deadly hatred against the reptile whose fortunes he had made and who had so poisonously bitten him in return. He was heard to declare that alive or dead he would have his enemy by the heel some day, and no one doubted but that he meant it.

Some months later, as the successful partner was returning home from his office one winter night, a pistol

shot cracked behind him and he was constrained to measure his portly figure in the slush of the street. There his late partner came and looked upon him and gave a weltering grunt, like a satisfied hog, and kicked the body and went his way. But his victim was scarcely finished with in the manner he fancied. The ball, glancing from a lamp-post, had smashed the bones of his right heel only, and he was merely feigning death. When his enemy was retired he crawled home on his hands and knees, leaving a sluggish trail of crimson behind him, and, once safe in the fortress of his household, sent for the doctor and an inspector of police.

The would-be murderer was of course captured, tried and sentenced to a twenty-year term of penal servitude. He made no protest and took it all in the nature of things. But, before leaving the dock, he repeated—looking with a quiet smile on his becrutched and bandaged oppressor sitting pallidly in the court—his remarkable formula about “alive or dead” having him by the heel some day.

Then he disappeared from Winton’s ken and for sixteen years the town knew him no more, and his victim prospered exceedingly and walked far into the regions of wealth and honor, for all a painful limp that seemed as if it should have impeded his advance.

At the end of this time a little local excitement was stirred by the return of the criminal, out on ticket-of-leave, and presenting all the appearance of a degraded, battered and senile old man. His one-time partner—a town councilor by then—resented his intrusion exceedingly; but finding him to be impervious, apparently, to the sting of memory, and presumably harmless to sting any more on his own account, he bestirred himself to quarter the driveling wreck on an almshouse—a proceeding which gained him much approval on the part of all but those who retained recollection of the origin of the quarrel.

In this happy asylum the poor ruin breathed his last within a month of its admission, and the rubbish of it was buried—not in the pauper corner of some city cemetery, as one might suppose, but in the very yard of the

cathedral itself. For, curiously enough, the fading creature before his death had claimed lying-room in a family vault sunk in that august inclosure, and his claim was found to be a legitimate one.

I knew the place where he lay, well; for an end of the old vault they had opened for his accommodation tunneled under a pathway that cut the yard obliquely, and, passing along it one's feet hit out the spot in a low reverberating thud of two steps that spoke of hollowness beneath the gravel.

The July of the present year I write of being the fourth from that poor thing's death and burial, was marked by one of the most terrific thunderstorms that have ever in my memory visited Winton.

If there was one man abroad in those bitter hours, there was one only, I should say, and he paid a grewsome price for his temerity. He was returning home from a birthday party, was that fated councilor, and, fired with a Dutch courage, must have taken that very path across the yard under which his once partner lay, and which he generally for some good reason rather avoided. What followed he might never describe himself, for that was the last of him. But a strange and eerie scene met the sight of an early riser abroad in the yard the next morning.

It appeared that a bolt had struck and wrenched a huge limb from one of the great lime trees skirting the path; that the heavy butt of this, clapping down upon that spot of the gravel under which the end of the vault lay, had splintered the massive lid stone into half a dozen pieces, so that they collapsed and fell inward, crashing upon and breaking open in their fall the pauper's coffin underneath.

"Whom God seeks to destroy, He first maddens." Into this awful trap, in the rain and storm and darkness, Mr. Councilor walked plump, and there he was found in the morning, dead and ghastly, his already once-wounded leg caught in a crevice made by the broken stone and wood—his heel actually resting in the bony hand of his enemy who had waited for him so long.

All that by the way. It was a grim enough story by itself, no doubt, but I mention it only here as bearing indirectly upon a little matter of my own.

Old Peggy had retailed it to me, with much grisly decoration, on the afternoon following the night of the tempest. The thorns of her mind were stored with a wriggling half-hundred of such tales.

By and by I walked out to visit the scene of the tragedy. It was dark and gloomy and still threatening storm. There was little left of the ruin of the night. The fallen branch had been sawed to lengths and carted away, and only its litter remained; the vault had been covered in again with a great slab lifted and brought from one of the precinct pathways that were paved with ancient gravestones; a solitary man was raking and trimming the gravel over the restored surface. The crowds who no doubt had visited the spot during the day were dwindled to a half-dozen morbid idlers, and a sweeping flaw of tempest breaking suddenly from the clouds even as I approached drove the last of these to shelter.

I myself scuttled for a long low tunnel that pierced a south wing of the cathedral and promised the best cover available. This was to be reached by way of a double-arched portal which enjoyed the distinction of conveying ill-luck to any who should have the temerity to walk through a certain one of its two openings.

Turning when I reached the archway, I saw that the solitary grave-trimmer was running for the same shelter as myself. With head bent to the storm, he bolted through the gate of ill-omen; stopped, recognized his error, hurriedly retraced his steps; spat out the evil and came through the customary opening at slower pace. As he approached me I saw, what I had not noticed before, that he was my friend the sexton of St. John's.

"Good-afternoon," said I, as he walked under the tunnel, seized off his cap and jerked the rain drops from it.

I fancied there was a queer wild look on his face, and at first he hardly seemed to be able to make me out.

"Ah!" he said, suddenly. "Good-afternoon to you."

Even then he didn't look at but beyond me, following

with his bloodshot eyes, as it were, the movements of something on the stone wall at my back.

"So you're translated, it appears?"

"Eh?" he said, vaguely.

"You're promoted to the yard here, aren't you?"

"I come to oblige Jem Sweet, ars be down wi' the arsmar," he said.

"That was friendly, anyhow. It was an unchancy task you took upon yourself."

"What isn't?" he shouted, quite fiercely, all in a moment. "Give me another marn as'll walk all day wi' the devil arm in arm, as I does."

"You found him down there, eh?"

He took off his cap and flung it with quick violence at the wall behind me, then pounced upon it lying on the ground, as if something were caught underneath it.

"My!" he muttered, rising with the air of a schoolboy who has captured a butterfly, and, seeking to investigate his prize, made a frantic clutch in the air, as if it had escaped him.

"What's that?" said I, "a wasp?"

"A warsp!" he cried in a sort of furious fright. "Who ever see a pink warsp wi' a mouth like a purse and blue inside?"

He stood by me, shaking and perspiring, and suddenly seized me with a tremulous hand.

"They shudn't a' sent me down there," he whispered; "it give me the horrors, it did, to see that they'd burried him quick, and that for fower year he'd been struggling and wrenching to get out."

"I'm afraid that the devil's got you indeed, my friend."

"It's all along o' thart. He come and he looked down upon me there in the pit."

"Who did? The devil?"

"Him or thart Chis'll doctor. It's all one. I swat cold, I tell ye. I see his face make a ugly fiddle-pattern on the sky. My mate, he'd gone to dinner and the yard was nigh empty. 'Look'ee here,' I whispered up to him. 'He were burried quick, as they burried that boy over in St. John's, yonder, that you murdered.'"

CHAPTER XLI.

ACROSS THE WATER.

For an instant the blood in my arteries seemed to stop, so that I gasped when I tried to speak.

"What boy was that?" I said, in a forced voice, when I could command myself.

"What boy?—eh?—what boy?" His eyes were wandering up and down the wall again. "Him, I say, as they burried quick—young Trender o' the mill."

"How do you know he was buried alive? How could he have been if he was murdered?"

"How do I know? He were murdered, I say. I'm George White, the sexton—and what I knows, I knows."

"And the doctor murdered him?"

"Don't I say so?"

He had hardly spoken, when he put his hand to his head, moved a step back and stood staring at me with horror-stricken, injected eyes.

"My God!" he muttered. "He whispered there into the pit that if I said to another what I said to him I were as good as a dead man."

The panic increased in him. I could see the tortured soul moving, as it were, behind the flesh of his face. When the nerve of endurance snapped he staggered and fell forward in a fit.

Helpless to minister to a convulsion that must find its treatment in the delirium ward of a hospital, I ran to the police station, which was but a short distance away, and gave information of the seizure I had witnessed. A stretcher was sent for the poor, racked wretch; he was carried away spluttering and writhing, and so for the time being my chance of questioning him further was ended.

Now, plainly and solemnly: Had I been face to face

with an awful fragment of the truth, or had I been but the chance hearer of certain delirious ravings on the part of a drink-sodden wretch—ravings as baseless as the unsubstantial horror at which he had flung his cap?

That the latter seemed the more probable was due to an obvious inconsistency on the part of the half-insane creature. If the boy had been murdered, how could he have been buried alive? Moreover, it was evident that the sexton was near a monomaniac on the subject of living interments. Moreover, secondly, it was altogether improbable and not to be accounted for that the keen-witted doctor should intrust a secret so perilous to such a confederate. And what object had he to gain by the destruction of Modred, beyond the satisfying of a little private malice perhaps? An object quite incompatible with the fearful danger of the deed.

On the other hand, I could not but recall darkly that the sexton, on the morning when, apparently sane and sensible, he had conducted me to my brother's grave, had thrown out certain vague hints and implications, which, hardly noticed by me at the time, assumed a lurider aspect in the light of his more definite charge; that, by Zyp's statement to me after my illness, it would seem that Dr. Crackenthorpe had shown some eagerness and made voluntary offer of his services, in the matter of hushing up the whole question of Modred's death; that it was not impossible that he also had discovered the boy's knowledge of the secret of the hiding-place and had jumped at a ready opportunity for silencing forever an unwelcome confederate.

Stung to sudden anxious fervor by this last thought, I broke into a hurried walk, striving by vigorous motion to coax into consistent order of progression the dread hypothesis that so tore and worried my mind. Suddenly I found that, striding on preoccupied, I was entering that part of the meadowland wherein lay the pool of uncanny memories. It shone there before me, like a silver rent in the grass, the shadow of a solitary willow smudged upon its surface, and against the trunk of the tree that stood on the further side of the water a long, dusky figure

was leaning motionless. It was that of the man who was most in my thoughts; and, looking at him, even at that distance, something repellant in his aspect seemed to connect him fittingly with the stormy twilight around him that was imaged in my soul.

Straight I walked down to the water's edge and hailed him, and, though he made no response, I saw consciousness of my presence stir in him.

"I want a word with you!" I called. "Shall I shout it across the river?"

He slowly detached himself from his position and sauntered down to the margin over against me.

"Proclaim all from the housetops, where I am concerned," he answered in a loud voice. "Who is it wants me, and what has he to say?"

"You know me, I suppose?"

"I have not that pleasure, I believe."

"Never mind. I have just come from talk with a confederate of yours—the sexton of St. John's."

"I know the man certainly. Is he in need of my services?"

"He would say 'God forbid' to that, I fancy. He's had enough of you, maybe."

"Oh, in what way?"

"In the way of silencing awkward witnesses."

"Pray be a trifle less obscure."

"I have this moment left him. He was seized with a fit of some sort. He'd rather have the devil himself to wait upon him than you, I expect."

"Why so?"

"I had some talk with him before he went off his head. Do you wish to know what he charged you with?"

"Certainly I do."

"Murder!"

Dr. Crackenthorpe looked at me across the water a long minute; then, never taking his eyes off my face, lifted up the skirts of his coat and began to shamble and jerk out the most ludicrous parody of a dance I have ever seen. Then, all of a sudden, he stopped and was doubled up in a suffocating cackle of laughter.

Presently recovering himself, he walked off down the bank to a point where the stream narrowed, and motioned me to come opposite him.

"It's not from fear of you and your sexton," he explained, still gasping out the dry dust of his humor. "Your exquisite pleasantry has weakened my vocal chords—that's all."

I treated him to a long stare of most sovereign contempt. For all his assumed enjoyment, I fancied he was pretty observant of my mood and that he was calculating the nature of the charge I had fired at him.

"And whom did I murder?" he said, making a great show of mopping his face with his handkerchief.

"Say it was my brother Modred."

"I'm glad, for your sake, to hear you qualify it. You should be, that there is no witness to this gross slander. I presume you to be, then, one of that pleasant family of Trender, who have a local reputation none of the sweetest."

He came down close to the water's edge—we were but a little distance apart there—and shook a long finger at me.

"My friend, my friend," he said, sternly, "your excuse must be the hot-headedness of youth. For the sake of your father, who once enjoyed my patronage, I will forbear answering a fool according to his folly. For his sake I will be gentle and convincing, where it is my plain duty, I am afraid, to chastise. This man you speak of is a heavy drinker, and is now, by your own showing, on the verge of delirium tremens. Do you take the gross imaginings of such a person for gospel?"

"Dr. Crackenthorpe," I said, quietly, "your threats fall on stony ground. I admit the man is hardly responsible for his statements at the present moment; only, as it happens, I have met and spoken with him before."

I thought I could see in the gathering darkness his lips suck inward as if with a twitch of pain.

"And did he charge me then with murdering your brother?"

"He said what, viewed in the light of his after outburst, has awakened grave suspicions in me."

He threw back his head with a fresh cackle of laughter.

"Suspicious!" he cried. "Is that all? It's natural to have them, perhaps. I had mine of you once, you know."

"You lie there, of course. By your own confession, you lie."

"And now," he went on, ignoring my interruption, "they are diverted to another."

"Will you answer me a question or two?"

"If they are put with a proper sense of decorum I will give them my consideration."

"Do you know where my father keeps the treasure, the bulk of which you have robbed him of?"

"Most offensively worded." But I will humor you. I never had need"—he shot out an evil smile—"of obtaining my share of the good things by other than legitimate means."

"Do you know?"

"No, I don't, upon the honor of a gentleman."

"Did my brother that's dead know?"

"Really, you tempt me to romance to satisfy your craving for information. I was not in your brother's confidence."

"Was there the least doubt that my brother was dead when he was buried?"

"Ah! I see. You have been hunting chimeras in George White's company. It is the man's were wolf, my good friend. You may take my professional certificate that no such thing happened."

I looked at him, my soul lowering with doubt and the gloom of baffled vengeance.

"Have you anything further to ask?" he said, with mocking politeness. "Any other insane witness to cite on behalf of this base and baseless prosecution?"

"None at present."

I turned and walked a step or two, intending to leave him without another word, but, on a thought, strode back to the waterside.

"Listen you!" I cried. "For the time you are quit of me. But bear in mind that I never rest or waver in my purpose till I have found who it was that killed my brother."

With that I went from him.

CHAPTER XLII.

JASON'S SECOND VISIT.

It behooves me now to pass over a period of two years during which so little happened that bore directly upon the fortunes of any concerned in this lamentable history that to touch upon them would be to specify merely the matter-of-fact occurrences of ordinary daily life. To me they were an experience of peace and rest such as I had never yet known. I think—a long sleep on the broad sands of forgetfulness, whitherward the storm had cast me, and from which it was to tear me by and by with redoubled fury and mangle and devour my heart in glutinous ferocity.

As yet, however, the moment had not come, and I lived and went my way in peace and resignation.

The first forewarning came one September afternoon of that second year of rest.

I had been butterfly-hunting about the meadows that lay to the west of the city, when a particularly fine specimen of the second brood of Brimstone tempted me over some railings that hedged in the ridge of a railway cutting that here bisected the chalky slopes of pasture land. I was cautiously approaching my settled quarry, net in hand, when I started with an exclamation that lost me my prize.

On the metals, some distance below, a man whose attitude seemed somehow familiar to me was standing.

I shaded my eyes with my hand and looked down, with bewilderment and a little fear constricting my heart.

He stood very still, staring up the line, and a thickness

came in my throat, so that I could not for the moment call to him as I wanted to. For there was an ominous suggestion in his posture that sent a wave of sickness through me—a suggestion of rigid expectation, like that one might fancy a victim of the old reign of terror would have shown as he waited his turn on the guillotine.

And as I paused in indecision—at that moment came a surging rumble and a puff of steam from a dip in the hills a hundred yards away, and the figure threw itself down, with its neck stretched over the shining vein of iron that ran in front of it. And I cried "Jason!" in a nightmare voice, and had hardly strength to turn my head away from the sight that I knew was coming. Yet through all my sick panic the shadow of a thought flashed—blame me for it who will—"Let me bear it and not give way, for he is taking the sure way to end his terror."

The thunder of the monster death came with the thought—shook the air of the hills—broke into a piercing scream of triumph as it rushed down on its victim—passed and clanged away among the hollows, as if the crushed mass in its jaws were choking it to silence. Then I brushed the blind horror from my eyes and looked down.

He was lying on the chalk of the embankment below me; he was stirring; he sat up and looked about him with a bewildered stare. The tragedy had ended in bathos after all. At the last moment courage had failed the poor wretch and he had leaped from the hurtling doom.

Shaking all over, I scrambled, slipping and rolling, down the slope, and landed on my feet before him.

"Up!" I cried; "up! Don't wait to speak or explain! They'll telegraph from the next stopping-place, and you'll be laid by the heels for attempted suicide."

He rose staggering and half-fell against me.

"Renny," he whimpered in a thick voice and clutched at my shoulders to steady himself. "My God! I nearly did it—didn't I?"

"Come away, I tell you. It'll be too late in another half-hour."

I ran him, shambling and stumbling, down the cutting till we had made a half-circuit of the town and were able to enter it at a point due east to that we had left. Then at last, on the slope of that quiet road we had crossed when escaping from Duke, I paused to gather breath and regard this returned brother of mine.

It was a sorry spectacle that met my vision, a personality pitiably fallen and degraded during those thirty months or so of absence. It was not only that the mere animal beauty of it was coarsened and debauched into a parody of itself, but that its informing spirit was so blunted by indulgence as to have lost forever that pathetic dignity of despair, with which a hounding persecution had once inspired it.

As I looked at him, at his dull, bloodshot eyes and loose pendulous lower lip, my heart hardened despite myself and I had difficulty in addressing him with any show of civility.

"Now," I said, "what next?"

He stared at me quite expressionless and swayed where he stood. He was stupid and sodden with drink, it was evident.

"Let's go home," he said. "I'm heavy for sleep as a hedgehog in the sun."

I set my lips and pushed him onward. It was hopeless entirely to think of questioning him as to the reason of his sudden reappearance, and under such circumstances, in his present state. The most I could do was to get him within the mill as quietly as possible and settle him somewhere to sleep off his debauch.

In this I was successful beyond my expectations, and not even my father, who lay resting in his room—as he often did now in the hot afternoons—knew of his return till late in the evening.

In the fresh gloom of the evening he stirred and woke. His brain was still clouded, but he was in, I supposed, such right senses as he ever enjoyed now. At the sound of his moving I came and stood over him. He stared at me for a long time in silence, as he lay.

"Do you know where you are?" I said at last.

"Renny—by the saints!" He spoke in a dry, parched whisper. "It's the mill, isn't it?"

"Yes; it's the mill. I brought you here filthy with drink, after you'd tried to throw yourself under a train and thought better of it."

He struggled wildly into a sitting posture and his eyelids blinked with horror.

"I thought of it all the way in the train—coming up—from London," he said in a shrill undervoice. "When I got out at the station I had some more—the last straw, I suppose—for I wandered, and found myself above the place—and the devil drove me down to do it."

"Well, you repented, it seems."

"I couldn't—when I heard it. And the very wind of it seemed to tear at me as it passed."

"What brings you to London? I thought you were still abroad."

"What drove me? What always drives me? That cruel, persecuting demon!"

"He found you out over there, then?"

"I can't hide from him. I've never had a week of rest and peace after that first year. It was all right then. I threw upon the green cloth the miserable surplus of the stuff you lent me and won. For six months we lived like fighting cocks. We dressed the young 'un in the color that brought us luck. My soul, she's a promising chick, Renny. You're her uncle, you know; you can't go back from that."

"Where did he come across you?"

"In a kursaal at Homburg. We were down in the mouth then. Six weeks of lentils and sour bread. I saw him looking at me across the petits chevaux table—curse his brute's face! We never got rid of him after that. Give me some drink. My heart's dancing like a pea on a drum."

"There's water on the wash-hand stand."

"Don't talk like that. There's a fire here no water can reach."

"I see there is. You've added another strand to the rope that's dragging you down."

He fell back on the bed, writhing and moaning.

"What's the good of moralizing with a poor fool condemned to perdition? It's my only means of escaping out of hell for a moment. Sometimes, with that in me, I'm a man again."

"A man!"

"There—get it for me, like a dear old chap, and don't talk. It's so easy for a saint to point a moral."

He was so obviously on the verge of utter collapse that I felt the lesser responsibility would be to humor him. I fetched what he begged for and he gulped down a wine-glassful of the raw stuff.

"Now," I said, "are you better?"

"A little drop more and I'm a peacock with my tail up." He tossed off a second dose of almost like proportion.

"Now," he said, dangling his legs over the bedside, and giving a foolish reckless laugh, "question, mon frere, and I will answer."

Though his manner disgusted and repelled me, I must needs get to the root of things.

"You fled from him to England again?"

"To London, of all places. It's the safest in the world, they say; where a man may leave his wife and live in the next street for twenty-five years without her knowing it."

"You haven't left yours?"

"No—we stick together. Zyp's trumps, she is, you long-faced moralizer; not that she holds one by her looks any longer. And that's to my credit for sticking to her. You missed something in my being beforehand with you there, I can tell you."

Was this pitiful creature worth one thrill of passion or resentment? I let him go on.

"For months that devil followed us," he said. "At last he forced a quarrel upon me in some vile drinking-place and brought me a challenge from the man he was seconding. You should have seen his face as he handed it to me! It took all the fighting nerve out of me. I swear I would have stood up to his fellow if he had found another backer."

"And you ran away?"

"What else could I do?"

"And he pursued you again?"

"There isn't any doubt of it—though his dreadful face hasn't appeared to me as yet."

"You had the nerve, it seems, to travel down here all alone?"

"I borrowed it. Sometimes now, when the stuff runs warm in me, I feel almost as if I could turn upon him and defy him. I'm in the mood at this moment. Why doesn't he come when I'm ready for him? Oh, the brute! The miserable, cowardly brute!"

He jumped to his feet, gnashing his teeth and shaking his fists convulsively in the air.

As he stood thus, the door of the room opened, and I turned to see my father fall forward upon his face, with a bitter cry.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ANOTHER RESPITE.

Jason stood looking stupidly down on the prostrate form, while I ran to it and struggled to turn it over and up into a sitting posture.

"Father!" I cried, "I'm here—don't you know me?"—then I turned fiercely to my brother and bade him shift his position out of the range of the staring eyes.

"What's the matter?" he muttered, sullenly. "I've done no harm. Can't he see me, even, without going off into a fit?"

"Get further away; do you hear?"

He shambled aside, murmuring to himself. A little tremulous sigh issued from the throat of the poor stricken figure. I leaned over, seized the bottle of brandy from the bed, and moistened his lips with a few drops from it.

"Does that do you good, dad?"

He nodded. I could make out that he was trying to speak, and bent my head to the weak whisper.

"I saw somebody."

"I know—I know. Never mind that now. Leave it all to me."

"You're my good son. You won't let him rob me, Renny?"

"In an hour or two he shall be packed off. You needn't even see him again."

"Is he back in England?"

"In London, yes."

"What does he want?"

"To see us—that's all."

"Not money?"

"No, no. He isn't in need of that just now. Can you move back to your bed, do you think, if I help you?"

"You won't let him come near me?"

"He shall go straight from this room out of the house."

"Come," he said, presently; "I'll try."

I almost lifted him to his feet, and he clung to my arm, stumbling beside me down the passage to his room.

When he was lying settled on his bed, and at ease once more, I returned to my brother.

He was sitting in a maudlin attitude by the window, and I saw that he had been at the bottle again.

"Now," I said, sternly, "let's settle the last of this with a final question: What is it you want?"

He looked up at me with an idiotic chuckle.

"Wand? What everybody's always wanding, and I most of all."

"You mean more money, I suppose?"

"More? Yes, mush more—mush more than you gave me last time, too."

"Not so much, probably. But lest Zyp should starve I'll send you what I can in the course of a few days."

He rose with a feebly menacing look.

"I'm not going till I get what I wand. I wand my part of the treasure. I know where it's hid, you fool, and I'm wound up for a try at it. Ge' out of my way! I'll go and help myself."

He made a stumbling rush across the room and when I interposed myself between the door and him he struck

out at me with a blow as aimless and unarmful as a baby's.

"If you don't knock under at once," I said, "I swear I'll tie you up and keep you here for Duke's next coming."

He stood swaying before me a moment; then suddenly threw himself on the bed, yelping and sobbing like an hysterical school-girl.

"It's too cruel!" he moaned. "You take advantage of your strength to bully me beyond all bearing. Why shouldn't I have my share as well as you?"

"Never mind all that. Give me your address if you want anything at all."

He lay some time longer yet; then fetched out a pencil and scrap of paper and sulkily scrawled what I asked for.

"Now"—I looked at my watch—"there's a train back to town in half an hour. You'd best be starting."

"Nice hospitality, upon my word. Supposing I stop the night?"

"You're not going to stop the night, unless you wish to do so in the street."

"I've a good mind to, you beast, and bring a crowd about the place."

"And Duke with it, perhaps—eh?"

His expression changed to one most fulsomely fawning.

"Renny," he said, "you can't mean to treat me, your own brother, like this? Let's have confidence in one another and combine." He gave a little embarrassed laugh. "I know where the treasure's hid, I tell you. S'posing we share it and——"

He stopped abruptly, with an alarmed look. Something in my face must have forewarned him, for he walked unsteadily to the door, glancing fearfully at me. Passing the brandy bottle on his way, he seized it with sudden defiance.

"I'll have this, anyhow," he murmured. "You won't object to my taking that much away."

Hugging it to his breast under his coat, he went from the room. I followed him down the stairs; saw him out

of the house; shut the door on him. Then I listened for his shuffling footstep going up the yard and away before I would acknowledge to myself that he had been got rid of at a price small under the circumstances.

I remained at my post for full assurance of his departure for many minutes after he had left, and when at last I stole up to my father's room I found the old man fallen into a doze. Seen through the wan twilight how broken and decaying and feeble he seemed!

I sat by him till he stirred and woke. His eyes opened upon me with a pleased look at finding me beside him, and he put out a thin rugged hand and took mine into it.

"I've been asleep," he said. "I dreamed a bad son of mine came back and terrified the old man. It was a dream, wasn't it, Renny?"

"Only a dream, dad. Jason isn't here."

"I thought it was. It didn't trouble me much, for all that. I learned confidence in the presence of this strong good fellow here."

"Dad, we've £30 left of the fifty I raised two months ago on that Julian medallion. May I have ten of them?"

"Ten pounds, Renalt? That's a mighty gap in the hoard."

"I want it for a particular purpose. You can trust me not to ask you if it were to be avoided."

He gave a deep sigh.

"Take it, then. It isn't in you to misapply a trust."

He turned his face away with a slight groan. Poor old man! My soul cried out with remorse to so trouble his confidence in me. Yet what I proposed seemed to me best.

He would not rise and come down to supper when I suggested it.

"Let me lie here," he said. "Sometimes it seems to me, Renalt, I'm breaking up—that the wheel down there crows and sings for a victim again."

It was the first time I had ever heard him directly refer to this stormy heart of the old place, that had throbbed out so incessantly its evil influence over the lives shut within range of it. It was plunging and murmuring

now in the depths below us, so insistent even at that distance that the soft whining of the stones in our more immediate neighborhood was scarcely audible.

"It's a bewildering discovery," he went on, "that of finding oneself approaching the wonderful bourne one has struggled toward so long. I don't think I'm afraid, Renalt, lying here in peace and watching my soul walk on. Yet now, though I know I have done two great and wicked deeds in my lifetime, I wouldn't put off the moment of that coming revelation by an hour."

I stroked his hand, listening and wondering, but I made no answer.

"It's like being a little child," he said; "fascinated and compelled toward a pleasant fright. When you were a toddling baby, if one came at you menacing and growling in fun, you'd open your eyes in doubt with fear and laughter; and then, instead of flying the danger, would run at it half-way and be caught up in daddy's arms and kissed. That seems to illustrate death to me now. The heart of that grim, time-worn playfellow may be very soft, after all. It's best not to cry out, but to run to him and be caught up and kissed into forgetfulness."

Oh, my father! How in my soul did I echo your words!

He wandered on by such strange sidewalks till speech itself seemed to intermingle with the inarticulate language of dream. Is there truth after all in the senile visions of age that can penetrate the veil of the supernal, though the worn and ancient eyes are dim with cataracts?

As I sat alone with my thoughts that night many emotions, significant or pathetic, wrought changing phantoms of the shadows in the dimly lighted room. Sometimes, shapeless and full of heavy omen, they revolved blindly about that dark past life of my father, a little corner of the curtain over which had that evening been lifted for my behoof. Sometimes they thrilled with spasms of pain at the prospect of that utter loneliness that must fall upon me were the old man's quiet foretelling of his doom to justify itself. Sometimes they took a red tinge of gloom in memory of his words of self-denunciation.

What had been a worser evil in him than that long degrading of his senses? Yet, of the "wicked deeds" he had referred to, that which could hardly be called a "deed" was surely not one. Perhaps, after all, they were nothing but the baseless product of a fancy that had indulged morbidity until, as with Frankenstein, the monster it had created mastered it.

Might this not be the explanation of all? Even of that eerily expressed fear of his, that had puzzled me in its passing, that the wheel was calling for a victim again?

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE SECRET OF THE WHEEL.

The day that followed the unlooked-for visit of my brother Jason to the mill my father spent in bed. When, in the morning, I took him up his breakfast, I could not help noticing that the broad light flooding the room emphasized a change in him that I had been only partly conscious of the evening before. It was as if, during the night, the last gleams of his old restless spirit had died out. I thought all edges in him blunted—the edges of fear, of memory, of observation, of general interest in life.

The immediate cause of this decline was, with little doubt, the shock caused by my brother's unexpected return. To this I never again heard him allude, but none the less had the last of his constitution succumbed to it, I feel sure.

The midday post brought me a letter, the sight of which sent a thrill through me. I knew Zyp's queer crooked hand, that no dignity of years could improve from its immature schoolgirl character. She wrote:

"Dear Renny: Jason told you all, I suppose. We are back again, and dependant on dad's bounty, and yours. Oh, Renny, it goes to my heart to have to wurry you once more. But we are in soar strates, and so hampered in looking for work from

the risk of coming across him again. At present he hasn't found us out, I think, but any day he may do so. If you could send us ever so little it would help us to tide over a terrible crisis. The little one is wanting dainties, Renny; and we—it is hard to say it—bread sometimes. But she will only eat of the best, and chocolates she loves. I wish you could see her. She is my own fairy. I work the prettiest flowers into samplers, and try to sell them in the shops; but I am not very clever with my needle; and Jason laughs at them, though my feet ache with walking over these endless paving stones. Renny, dear, I must be a beggar, please. Don't think hardly of me for it, but my darling that's so pretty and frail! Oh, Renny, help us. Your loving sister,
ZYP."

"What you send, if anything, please send it to me. That's why I write for the chief part. Jason would give us his last crust; but—you saw him, Renny, and must know."

I bowed my head over the queer, sorrowful little note. That this bold, reliant child of nature should come to this! There and then I vowed that, so long as I had a shilling I could call my own, Zyp should share it with me, at a word from her.

I wrote to her to this effect. I placed my whole position before her and bade her command me as she listed; only bearing in mind that my father, old and broken, had the first claim upon me. Then I went out and bought the largest and most fascinating box of chocolates I could secure, and sent it to her as a present to my little unknown niece, and forwarded also under cover the order for the £10.

A day or two brought me an acknowledgment and answer to my letter. The latter shall forever remain sacred from any eyes but mine; and, unless man can be found ready to brave the curse of the dead, shall lie with me, who alone have read it, in the grave.

On the morning preceding that of its arrival, a fearful experience befell me, that was like to have choked out my soul then and there in one black grip of horror.

All that first day after Jason's visit my father lay abed, and, whenever I visited him, was cheerfully garrulous, but without any inclination to rise. The following morning also he elected to have breakfast as before in his

room; and soon after the meal he fell into a light doze, in which state I left him.

It was about 11 o'clock that, sitting in the room below, I was startled by hearing a sudden thud above me that shook the beams of the ceiling. I rushed upstairs in a panic and found him lying prostrate on the floor, uninjured apparently, but with no power of getting to his feet again.

"What's this?" I cried. "Dad! Are you hurt?"

He looked at me a little wondering and confused, but answered no, he had only slipped and fallen when rising to don his clothes.

I lifted him up and he couldn't stand, but sunk down on the bed again with a blank, amazed look in his face.

"Renalt," he said, in a thin, perplexed voice, "what's happened to the old man? The will was there, but the power's gone."

Gone it was, forever. From that day he walked no more—did nothing but lie on his back, calm and unconcerned for the most part, and fading quietly from life.

But in the first discovery of his enforced inertness, some peculiar trouble, unconnected with the certain approach of death, lay on him like a black jaundice. Sitting by his side after I had got him back upon the bed, I would not break the long silence that ensued with shallow words of comfort, for I thought that he was steeling his poor soul as he lay to face the inevitable prospect.

Suddenly he turned on the bed—for his face had been darkened from me—and looked at me with his lips trembling.

"What is it, dad?"

"I'm down, Renny. I shall never rise again."

"You'll rest, dad; you'll rest. Think of the peace and quiet while I sit and read to you and the sun comes in at the window."

"Good lad! It isn't that, though rest has a beautiful sound to me. It's the thought—harkee, Renny! It's the thought that a task I've not failed in for twenty years and more must come to be another's."

"What task?"

"There are ears in the walls. Closer, my son. The task of oiling the wheel below."

"Shall I take it up, dad? Is that your wish?"

I answered stoutly, though my heart sunk within me at the prospect.

"You or nobody, it must be. Are you afraid?"

"I wish I could say I wasn't."

He clutched my hand in tremulous eagerness.

"Master it! You must, my lad! Much depends on it. They whisper the room is haunted. Not for you, Renalt, if for anybody. Haven't I been familiar with it all these years, and yet I lie here unscathed? How can it spare the evil old man and hurt the just son?"

He half-rose in his bed and stared with dilated eyes at the wall.

"You are there!" he cried, in a loud, quavering voice. "Out of the years of gloom and torture you menace me still! Why, it was just, I say! How could I have clung to my purpose and defied you, otherwise? You will never frighten me!"

He fell back, breathing heavily. In sorrow and alarm I bent over him. Suddenly conscious of my eyes looking down upon him, he smiled and a faint flush came to his cheek.

"Dreams and shadows—dreams and shadows!" he murmured. "You will take up my task, Renalt?"

"Must I, dad?"

"Oh, be a man!" he shrieked, grasping at me. "I have defied it—I, the sinner! And how can it hurt you?"

"Is it so necessary?"

"It's the key to all—the golden key! Were it to rust and stop, the secret would be open to any that might look, and the devil have my soul."

"Do you wish me, then, to learn the secret—whatever it is?"

He looked at me long, with a dark and searching expression.

"I ask you to oil the wheel," he said at length—"nothing more."

"Very well. I will do what you ask."

He gave a deep sigh and lay back with his eyes closed. I saw the faint color coming and going in his face. Suddenly he uttered a cry and turned upon me.

"My son—my son! Bear with me a little longer. It is an old habit and for long made my only joy in a dark world. I find it hard to part with my fetish."

"I don't want you to part with it. What does it matter? I will oil the wheel and you shall rest in peace that your task is being faithfully performed by another."

"Hush! You don't mean it, but every word is a reproach. I've known so little love; and here I would reject the confidence that is the sign of more than I deserve. For him, the base and cruel, to guess at it, and you to remain in ignorance! Renalt, listen; I'm going to tell you."

"No, dad; no!"

"Renalt, you won't break my heart? What trust haven't you put in me? And this is my return! Feel under my pillow, boy."

"Oh, dad; let it rest!"

Eagerly, impatiently, he thrust in his own hand and brought forth a shining key.

"Take it!" he cried. "It opens the box of the wheel. But first lower the sluice and turn the race into the further channel. You will see a rope dangling inside in the darkness. Hold on to it and work the wheel round with your hands till a float projecting a little beyond its fellows comes opposite you. In this you'll find a slit cut, ending in an eye-hole. Pass the rope, as it dangles, into this hole, and keep it in place by a turn of the iron button that's fixed underneath the slit. Now step on to the broad float, never letting go the rope, and the weight of your body will turn the wheel, carrying you downward till a knot in the rope stops your descent."

"What then, dad?"

"My son—you'll see the place that for twenty years has held the secret of my fortune."

CHAPTER XLV.

I MAKE A DESCENT.

If it had many a time occurred to me, since first I heard of the jar of coins, that the secret of their concealment was connected somehow within the room of silence, it must have done so from that old association of my father with a place that the rest of us so dreaded and avoided. The scorn of superstitious terror that he showed in his choice; the certainty that none would dream of looking there; the encouragement his own mysterious actions gave to the sense of a haunting atmosphere that seemed ever to hang about the neighborhood of the room—these were all so many justifications of the wisdom of his choice. Now I understood the secret of that everlasting lubrication; for had anything happened, when he might chance to be absent, to choke or damage the structure of the ancient wheel, the stoppage or ruin ensuing might have laid bare the hiding-place to any curious eye; for, as part of his general policy, I conclude, no veto except the natural one of dread was ever laid on our entering the room itself if we wished to.

"Well," I said, stifling a sigh that in itself would have seemed a breach of confidence, "when am I to do my first oiling, father?"

"It wasn't touched yesterday, Renalt. From the first I have not failed to do it once, at least, in the twenty-four hours."

"You would like me to go now—at once?"

"Ah! If you will."

"Very well."

As I was leaving the room he called me back.

"There's the oil can in yonder cupboard and a bull's-eye lantern fixed in a belt. You will want to light that and strap it round you."

I went and fetched them, and, holding them in my hand, asked him if there was anything more.

"No," he said; "be careful not to let go the rope; that's all."

"Why do you want me to go down, dad? Let me just do the oiling and come away."

"No, now—now," he said, with feverish impatience. "The murder's out and my conscience quit of it. You'll satisfy me with a report of its safety, Renalt? There's a brave fellow. It would be a sore thing to compose myself here to face the end, and not know but that something had happened to your inheritance."

My spirit groaned, but I said to him, very well; I would go.

He called to me once more, and I noticed an odd repression in his voice.

"Assure yourself, and me, of the safety of the jar. Nothing else. If by chance you notice aught beyond, keep the knowledge of it locked in your breast—never mention it or refer to it in any way."

Full of dull foreboding of some dread discovery, I left him and went slowly down the stairs.

I paused outside the ominous door, with a thought that a little whisper of laughter had reached my ears from its inner side. Then, muttering abuse on myself, for my cowardice, I pushed resolutely at the cumbrous oak and swung it open.

A cold, vault-like breath of air sighed out on me, and the marrow in my bones was conscious of a little chill and shiver. But I strode across the floor without further hesitation and fetched from my pocket the iron key. The hole it fitted into was near the edge of the great box that inclosed the wheel. Standing there in close proximity to the latter, I was struck by the subdued character of the flapping and washing sounds within. Heard at a distance, they seemed to shake the whole building with their muffled thunder. Here no formidable uproar greeted me; and so it was, I conclude, from the concentration of noise monopolizing my every sense.

I put in the key, swung open the door—and there be-

fore me was a section of a huge disk going round overwhelmingly, and all splashed and dripping as it revolved, with great jets of weedy-smelling water.

I say "disk," for the arms to this side had been boarded in, that none, I supposed, might gather hint of what lay beyond.

The eyes into which the shaft ends of the wheel fitted were sunk in the floor level, flush with the lintel of the cupboard door that lay furthest from the window; so that only the left upper quarter of the slowly spinning monster was visible to me.

It turned in an oblong pit, it seemed, wooden in its upper part, but going down into a narrow gully of brick, at the bottom of which the race boomed and roared with a black sound of fury.

If the hollow thunder of the unseen torrent had been dismal to hear, the sight of it boiling down there in its restricted channel was awful indeed. From the forward tunnel through which it escaped into the tail bay, a thin streak of light tinged the plunging foam of it with green phosphorescence and made manifest the terror of its depths.

For all my dread of the place, a strange curiosity had begun to usurp in me the first instincts of repulsion. Though I had been in the room some minutes, no malignant influence had crept over me as yet, and a hope entered me that by thus forcing myself to outface the fear I had perhaps triumphed over its fateful fascination.

Leaving the door of the cupboard open, I hurried from the room, and so to the rear of the building and the platform outside, where the heads of the sluices were that regulated the water flow. Here, removing the pin, I dropped the race hatch and so cut off the stream from the wheel.

Returning, I left open the door of the room that the wholesome atmosphere outside should neighbor me, at least, and means of escape, if necessary, readily offer themselves; and, lighting the lantern in the belt, strapped the latter round my waist.

When I came to the cupboard again the boom of water

below had subsided to a mouthing murmur, and the spin of the wheel was lazily relaxed, so that before it had turned half its own circumference it stood still and dripping. The sight when I looked down now was not near so formidable, for only a band of water slid beneath me as I bent over. Still, my heart was up in my mouth for all that, now the moment had come for the essaying of my task.

Oiling such parts of the machine as were within reach, I next grasped the rope, which I had at the first noticed hanging from the darkness above down into the pit, just clear of the blades, and set to peering for the broader float my father had mentioned. Luckily, the last motion of the wheel had brought this very section opposite me, so that I had no difficulty in slipping in the rope and securing it by means of the button underneath.

Then, with a tingling of the flesh of my thighs and a mental prayer for early deliverance, I stepped upon the blade, with a foot on either side of the rope to which I clung grimly, and in a moment felt myself going down into blackness.

The wheel turned gently under my weight, giving forth no creak or scream; and the dark water below seemed to rise at me rather than to wait my sinking toward it. But though the drip and slime of the pit shut me in, there was action in all I was doing so matter-in-fact as to half-cure me for the moment of superstitious terror.

Suddenly the wheel stopped with a little jerk and thud of the float on which I stood against a bend in the tackle that passed through it.

Holding on thus—and, indeed, the tension necessary to the act spoke volumes for my father's vigor of endurance—the light from the lantern flashed and glowed about the interior structure of the wheel before me. Then, looking between the blades—for the periphery of the great circle was not boxed in—I saw revealed to me in a moment the secret I had come to investigate. For, firmly set in a hole dug in the brick side of the chasm at a point so chosen within the sweep of the wheel that no spoke traversed it when it lay motionless, and at arm's reach

only from one standing on the paddle, was a vessel of ancient pottery about a foot in height, and so smeared and dank with slime as that a careless grasp on its rim might have sent the whole treasure clattering and raining through the wheel into the water below.

Cautiously I put out a hand, grasped and gently shook the jar. A dull jingle came from it, and so my task was accomplished.

By this time, however, I was so confident of my position that I got out the oil can and began to lubricate deliberately the further shaft end of the wheel. While I was in the very act, a metallic glint, struck by the lantern light from some object pinned on to the huge hub that crossed the channel almost directly in front of my line of vision, caught my eye and drove me to pause. I craned my neck to get a nearer view, and gave so great a start of wonder as to lose my hold of the oiler, which fell with clink and splash into the water underfoot.

Nailed to the great axle was something that looked like the miniature portrait of a man; but it was so stained and flaked by years of dark decay that the features were almost obliterated. The face had been painted in enamel on an oval of fluxed copper; yet even this had not been able to resist the long corrosion of the atmosphere in which it was held prisoner.

I could make out only that the portrait was that of a young man of fair complexion, thin, light-haired and dressed in the fashion of a bygone generation. More I had not time to observe; for, as I gazed, suddenly with a falling sway and a flicker the lantern at my waist went out.

CHAPTER XLVI.

CAUGHT.

In the first horror of blackness I came near to letting go the rope and falling from my perch on the blade. My brain went with a swing and turn and a sick wave over-

whelmed my heart and flooded all my chest with nausea.

Was I trapped after all—and just when confidence seemed established in me? For some evil moments I remained as I was, not daring to move, to look up, even; blinded only by the immediate plunge into cabined night, terrible and profound.

I had left the matches above. There was no rekindling of the lamp possible. Up through the darkness I must climb—and how?

Then for the first time it occurred to me that my father's directions had not included the method of the return journey. Perhaps he had thought it unnecessary. To clearer senses the means would have been obvious—a scramble, merely, by way of the paddles, while the wheel was held in position by the rope.

In the confusion of my senses I thought that my only way was to swarm up the dangling rope; and, without doubt, such was a means, if an irksome one, of escape. Only I should have left the tackle anchored as it was to the wheel. This I did not do, but, moved by a sudden crazy impulse, stooped and turned the button that held all in place.

It was good fortune only that saved me then and there from the full consequences of my act. For, pulled taut as it was, and well out of the perpendicular, the moment it was released the rope swung through the slit like a pendulum, carrying me, frantically clinging to it with one hand, off the paddle. Then, before I had time to put out my free hand to ward off the danger, clump against the wheel I came in the return swing, and with such force that I was heavily bruised in a dozen places and near battered from my hold.

Clawing and scratching like a drowning cat and rendered half-stupid by the blow, I yet managed to grasp the rope with my other hand, and so dangle there with little more than strength just to cling on. Once I sought to ease the intolerable strain on my arms by toeing for foothold on the paddle again, but the wheel, swinging free now, slipped from under me, so that I was nearly jerked from my clutch. Then there was nothing for it

but to gather breath and pray that power might come to me to swarm up the rope by and by.

Drooping my head as I hung panting, the blackness I had thought impenetrable was traversed by the green glint of light below that I have mentioned. The sight revived me in a moment. It was like a draught of water to a fainting soldier. Now I felt some connectedness of thought to be possible. With a bracing of all my muscles, I passed my legs about the rope and began toiling to drag myself upward.

I had covered half the distance, when I felt myself to be going mad. How this was I cannot explain. The fight against material difficulties had hitherto, it seemed, left tremors of the supernatural powerless to move me. Now, in a moment, black horror had me by the heart. That I should be down there—clambering from the depths of that secret and monstrous pit, the very neighborhood of which had always filled me with loathing, seemed a fact incredible in its stupendous unnature. This may sound exaggerated. It did not seem so to me then. Despite my manhood and my determination, in an instant I was mastered and insane.

Still I clung to the rope and crawled upward. Then suddenly I saw why night had fallen upon me in one palpable curtain when the lantern was extinguished; for the door of the cupboard was closed.

Had it only swung to? But what air was there in the close room beyond to move it?

Hanging there, like a lost and fated fiend, a bubble of wild, ugly merriment rose in me and burst in a clap of laughter. I writhed and shrieked in the convulsion of it; the dead vault rung with my hysterical cries.

It ceased suddenly, as it had begun, and, grinding my teeth in a frenzy of rage over the thought of how I had been trapped and snared, I swung myself violently against the door, and, letting go my hold at the same instant, burst it open with the force of my onset and rolled bleeding and struggling on the floor of the room beyond.

After a minute or two I rose into a sitting posture, leaning on one hand, half-stunned and half-blinded. A

dense and deadly silence about me; but this was penetrated presently by a fantastic low whispering sound at my back, as if there were those there that discussed my fate. I turned myself sharply about. Dull emptiness only of rotting floor and striding rafter, and the gathered darkness of wall corners.

The sense of fanciful murmuring left me, and in its place was born a sound as of something stealthily crossing the floor away from me. At the same instant the door of the room, which I had left open, swung softly to on its hinges, and I was shut in.

Then, with a fear that I cannot describe, I knew that the question was to be put to me once more, and that I was destined to die under the torture of it.

I had no hope of escape—no thought that the passion that prompted me to self-effacement might, diverted, carry me to the door in one hard dash for light and liberty. The single direction in which my mind moved unfettered was that bearing upon the readiest means to my purpose—to die, and thereto what offered itself more insistently than the black pit I had but now risen from? A run—a leap—a shattering dive—and the murmuring water and oblivion would have me forevermore.

I turned and faced the dark gulf. I pressed my hands to my bursting temples to still the throb of the arteries that was blinding me. Then, spasmodically, my feet moved forward a pace or two; I gave a long, quivering sigh; my arms dropped inert, and a blessed warmth of security gushed over all my being.

Pale; luminous; most dear and pitiful, an angel stood before the opening and barred my way. A shadow only—but an angel; a spirit come from the sorrowful past to save me, as I, alas! had never saved her.

I fell on my knees and held out my arms to her, with the drowning tears falling over my cheeks. I could not speak, but only moan like a child for cheer and comfort. And she smiled on me—the angel smiled on me, as Dolly, sweet and loving, had smiled of old. Oh, God! Oh, God! Thus to permit her to come from over the desolate waste for solace of my torment!

Was all this only figurative of the warring clash of passion and conscience? The presence was to me actual and divine. It led me, or seemed to lead, from the mouthing death—across the room—out by the open door, that none had ever shut; and then it was no longer and I stood alone in the gusty passage.

I stood alone and cured forever of the terror of that mad and gloomy place, whose influence had held me so long enthralled. Henceforth I was quit of its deadly malice. I knew it as certainly as that I was forgiven for my share in a most bitter tragedy that had littered the shore of many lives with wreckage. For me, at least, now, the question was answered—answered by the dear ghost of one whose little failings had been washed pure in the bountiful spring of life.

Presently, moved by the sense of sacred security in my heart, I passed once more into the room of silence—not with bravado, but strong in the good armor of self-reliance. I closed and locked the door of the cupboard and walked forth again, feeling no least tremor of the nerves—conscious of nothing to cause it. Thence I went out to the platform, and, levering up the sluice, heard the water discharge itself afresh into the hollow-booming channel that held the secret of the wheel.

And now, indeed, that my thoughts were capable of some order of progression, that very secret rose and usurped the throne of my mind, deposing all other claimants.

What weird mystery attached to the portrait nailed to the axle? That it was placed there by my father I had little doubt; but for what reason and of whom was it?

I recalled his wild command to me to never make reference to aught my eyes might chance to light upon, other than the treasure I had gone to seek. In that direction, then, nothing but silence must meet me.

Of whom was the portrait, and what the mystery?

On the thought, the attenuated voice of old Peggy came from the kitchen hard by in a cracked and melancholy stave of her favorite song:

"I washed my penknife in the stream—
Heigho!

I washed my penknife in the stream.

And the more I washed it the blood gushed out—
All down by the greenwood side, O!

Old Peggy! When had she first established her ghoul-ish reign over us? Had she been employed here in my mother's time? I only knew that I could not dispart her ancient figure and the mill in my memory.

I pushed open the door and walked into the kitchen. She was sitting darning by the frouzy little window—a great pair of spectacles on her bony nose—and looked at me with an eye affectedly vacant, as if she were a vicious old parrot speculating upon the most opportune moment for a snap at me.

"That's a pretty song, Peggy," I said.

"And a pretty old 'ooman to sing it," she answered.

"Were you ever young, Peggy?"

"Not that I remembers. I were barn wi' a wrinkle in my brow like a furrow-drain, and two good teeth in my headpiece."

"I dare say. How old were you when you first came here?"

"How old? Old enow and young enow to taste worm-wood in the sarce gleeted fro' three Winton brats."

"That's no answer, you know. What's your present age?"

"One hundred, mebbe."

"Was Modred born when you came?"

"Born? Eighteen bard months, to my sorrow. A rare gross child, to be sure; wi' sprawling fat puds like the feet o' them crocodillies in the show."

If Peggy could be trusted, I had got an answer which barred further pursuit in that direction. She could never, I calculated, have been personally acquainted with my mother or the circumstances of the latter's death. Indeed, I could not imagine her tolerated in a house over which any self-respecting woman presided.

Elsewhere I must look for some solution of the puzzle

that had added its complexity to a life already laboring under a burden of mystery.

But in the meantime, an older vital question re-reared its head from the very hearthstone of the mill, whereon it had lain so long in stupor that I might have fancied it dead.

CHAPTER XLVII.

SOME ONE COMES AND GOES.

November had come, with early frosts that flattened the nasturtiums in the town gardens and stiffened belated bees on the Michaelmas daisies, that were the very taverns of nature to lure them from their decent homes.

This year the complacent dogmatism of an ancient proverb was most amply justified by results:

"Be there ice in November that 'ill bear a duck,
There'll be nothing after but sludge and muck."

The belling winds of December were to drive up such clouds of rain and storm that every gully in the meadows was to join its neighbor in one common conspiracy against the land, and every stream to overrun its banks, swollen with the pride of hearing itself called a flood.

I had been reading one bright morning to my father until he fell asleep, and was sitting on pensively with the book in my hand, when I became aware of a step mounting the stairs below and pausing at the sitting-room door. I rose softly at once, and, descending, came plump upon Dr. Crackenthorpe, just as he was crossing the threshold to enter.

He was very sprucely dressed, for him, with a spray of ragged geranium in his button-hole; and this, no less than the mere fact of his presence in the house, filled me with a momentary surprise so great that I had not a word to say. Only I bowed him exceedingly politely into the parlor and civilly asked his business.

An expression of relief crossed his face, I thought, as

though he had been in two minds as to whether I should take him by the collar and summarily eject him there and then.

"I haven't seen your father about lately," he jerked out, with some parody of a smile that, I concluded, was designated to propitiate. "I called to inquire if the old gentleman was unwell."

"He is practically an invalid," I said; "he keeps entirely to his own room."

"Indeed? I am concerned. Nothing serious, I trust? My services, I need not say, are at the command of so valued an old friend."

"He needs no services but mine. It is the debility of old age, I fear—nothing more."

"Yet he is a comparatively young man. But it's true that to mortgage one's youth too heavily is to risk the premature foreclosing of old age."

"I dare say. Was there any other object in your visit?"

"One other—frankly."

He held out a damp hand to me. It shook rather.

"I'm tired of this duel of cross-purposes. Will you agree to cry an armistice—peace, if you like?"

I took him in from head to foot—a little to his discomfiture, no doubt.

"Is this pure philanthropy, Dr. Crackenthorpe?" I said.

"Most pure and disinterested," said he. "I claim, without offense, the grievance as mine, and I am the first to come forward and cry, Let there be an end to it."

"Not so fast. You start on a fundamental error. A grievance, as I take it, can only separate friends. There can be no question of such a misunderstanding between us, for we have always been enemies."

"That's your fancy," cried he; "that's your mistaken fancy! I'm not one to wear my heart on my sleeve. If I've always repressed show of my innate regard for you, you're not to think it didn't exist."

"Why waste so many words? That's a good form of regard, to act the bulldog to us, as you always did. It

was a chastening sense of duty, I suppose, that induced you to leave me for years under an ugly stigma when you knew all the time that I was innocent. Is your valued friendship for the old man best expressed by blackmailing and robbing him on the strength of a fragment of circumstantial evidence?"

"I have made myself particeps criminis. Does that go for nothing? A little consideration was due to me there. A moiety of the treasure he was squandering, I took advantage of my influence to secure in trust for his children. You shall have it all back again some day, and should show me profound gratitude in place of sinister disbelief."

"A fine cheapening of cupidity, and well argued. How long were you thinking it out?"

"As to that question of the suspicions you labored under—remember that any conclusion drawn from circumstances was hypothetical. I may have had a professional opinion as to the cause of death, and a secret one as to the means employed. That was conjecture; but if you are fair, you will confess that, by running away to London, you did much to incriminate yourself in men's minds."

"I never looked upon it in that light."

"I dare say not. Innocence, from its nature, may very often stultify itself. I think you innocent now. Then I was not so certain. It was not, perhaps, till your father sought to silence me, that my suspicions were diverted into a darker channel."

"You put a good case," I said, amazed at the man's plausibility. "You might convince one who knew less of you."

"You can prove nothing to my discredit. This is all the growth of early prejudice. Think that at any moment I might have denounced him and left the proof of innocence on his shoulders."

"And killed the goose with the golden eggs? I am not altogether childish, Dr. Crackenthorpe, or quite ignorant of the first principles of law. In England the

burden of proof lies on the prosecution. How would you have proceeded?"

"I should at least have eased my conscience of an intolerable load and escaped the discomforting reflection that I might be considered an accessory after the fact."

"As indeed you are in the sight of heaven by your own showing, though I swear my father is as innocent of the crime as I am."

He shrugged his shoulders with a deprecating gesture.

"Anyhow, my position shows my disinterestedness," he said.

"And you are growing frightened over it, it seems. Well, take whatever course pleases you. From our point of view, here, I feel quite easy as to results."

"You misapprehend me. This visit is actuated by no motive but that of friendliness. I wish to bury the hatchet and resume the pleasant relations that existed of old."

"They were too one-sided. Besides, all the conditions changed upon my return."

"And no one regretted it more than I. I have from the first been your true friend, as I have attempted to show. You have a valuable inheritance in my keeping. Indeed"—he gave a sort of high embarrassed titter—"it would be to your real advantage to hand the residue over to me before he has any further opportunity of dissipating it."

I broke into a cackle of fierce laughter.

"So," I cried, "the secret is out! I must compliment you on a most insatiable appetite. But, believe me, you have more chance of acquiring the roc's egg than the handful!"

He looked at me long and gloomily. I could feel rather than hear him echo: "The handful." But he made a great effort to resume his conciliatory tone when he spoke again.

"You jump to hot-headed conclusions. It was a simple idea of the moment, and as you choose to misinterpret it,

let it be forgotten. The main point is, are we to be friends again?"

"And I repeat that we can't resume what never existed. This posturing is stupid farce that had best end. Shall we make the question conditional? That cameo, that you have come into possession of—we won't hazard a supposition by what means—restore it, at least, to its rightful owner as an earnest of your single-mindedness. I, who am to inherit it in the end, give you full permission."

He started back, and his face went the color of a withered aspen leaf.

"It's mine," he cried, shrilly. "I wouldn't part with it to the queen!"

"See then! What am I to believe?"

I walked close up to him. His fingers itched to strike me, I could see.

"Dr. Crackenthorpe," I said, "you had best have spared yourself this errand. Why, what a poor scamp you must be to think to take me in with such a fusty trick. Make the most of what you've got. You'll not have another stiver from us. Look elsewhere for a victim. Your evil mission in life is the hounding of the wretched. Mine, you know. Some clews are already in my hand, and, if there is one man in the world I should rejoice to drag down—you are he!"

He walked to the door, and, turning, stamped his foot furiously down on the boards.

"You bitter dolt!" he roared, with a withering sneer. "Understand that the chance I gave you is withdrawn forever. There are means—there are means; and I——"

He stopped; gulped; put his hand to his throat, and walked out of the house without another word.

I stood looking after him, all blazing with anger. No least fear of the evil creature was in me, but only a blank fierce astonishment that he should thus have dared to brave me on my own ground. What cupidity was that, indeed, that could not only think to gloss over long years of merciless torment by a few false suave words, but could actually hope to find the profit of his condescension

in a post-prandial gorging of the fragments his inordinate gluttony of avarice had passed over!

However, putting all thought of him from me, I returned to my father.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A FRUITLESS SEARCH.

One result of Dr. Crackenthorpe's visit was that I determined to then and there push my secret inquiries to a head in the direction of my friend, the sexton of St. John's.

I had not seen or heard of this man since the day of his seizure in the archway of the close, but I thought his attack must surely by now have yielded and left him sane again.

That very afternoon, leaving my father comfortably established with book and paper, I walked over to the old churchyard under the hill and looked about among the graves for some sign of him who farmed them. The place was empty and deserted; it showed clearly that the hand of order was withdrawn and had not been replaced.

Not knowing whither to go to make inquiries, I loitered idly about some little time longer, in the hope that chance might throw some one who could direct me in my way.

Within my vision two mounds only stood out stark and sterile from the tangled green of Death's garden, and one was Modred's and the other the grave of the murdered man.

It was only a strange chance, of course, yet a strange chance it was that should smite those two out of all the yard with barrenness.

As I turned I was aware of a bent old man issuing from a side door of the church with a bunch of keys in his hand. To him I walked and addressed my inquiries.

"Ah!" he said, struggling out of a violent fit of coughing. "George White, sir? The man's dismissed for drunkenness. To my sorrer, so it is. I has to do his work till they finds a substitoot. It'll be the death of me this chill autumn."

"Do you know where he lives?"

"He ain't app'inted yet."

"George White, I mean?"

"He lives, if living he is, ower at Fullflood yonder. I misremember the number, but it's either 17 or 27, or mebbe 74. They'll tell you if you ask. Not but what I'd leave him alone, if I was you, for he'll do you no good."

"He can't do me any harm, at least. I think I'll try."

"Go your courses, then. Young men are that bold-blooded. Go your courses. You can't miss if you fol-lers my directions."

I had my own opinion as to that, but I tramped off to the district indicated, which lay in the western quarter of the town. Chance put out a friendly hand to me.

I had paused in indecision, when a woman standing at an open door behind me hailed another who was coming down the pavement with a little basket over her arm.

"Good-arternoon, Mrs. White," said the first wife as the other came up. "And how did ye find your marn?"

I pricked up my ears.

"No better and no worse, Mrs. Catty, and tharnk ye kindly."

"The horrors has left him, I'm told."

"Ye're told true, but little recommends the going. His face is the color o' my apron here—an awesome sight. It's the music membrim in his stommick, 'tis said that's out o' toon."

"Ah, ma dear, I know it. It's what the doctors call an orgin; and the pain is grinding."

"God bless ye—it's naught to what it were. 'Tis the colic o' the mind he suffers, one may say."

"Deary me, deary me! Poor Mr. White!"

"I left him a-sitting before the infirmary fire in a happy-

thetic state, they names it, though to my mind he looked wretched."

"And so must you be to harve your marn in the house. Well, well—and dismissed from his post, too, come rain or sunshine."

I hurried off, satisfied with what I had heard. If the woman with the basket was not the sexton's wife, there was no happy fortuity in fate. For a moment I had thought I would address myself to her, but the reflection that no good purpose could be answered thereby, and that by doing so I might awaken suspicions where none existed, made me think better of it.

Expanding her allusions, I writ down in my mind that George White, taken in hand by the police, had been remanded to the workhouse infirmary pending his recovery from an attack of delirium tremens, and such I found to be the case. Now the hope of getting anything in the nature of conclusive proof from him seemed remote. At least no harm could be done by me paying him a visit.

Fortunately I discovered, upon presenting myself at the "house," that it was a visitors' day, and that a margin yet remained of the time limit imposed upon callers.

I was referred to the infirmary doctor—a withered stick of a man, with an unprofessional beard the color and texture of dead grass. This gentleman's broadcloth, reversing the order of things, seemed to have worn out him, instead of he it, so sleek, imposing and many sizes too large for him were his clothes.

He listened with his teeth, it seemed, for his lip went up, exposing them every time he awaited an answer.

"George White? The man's in a state of melancholia following alcoholic excess. He is only a responsible creature at moments, and has hallucinations. I doubt his recovery."

"I might take my chance of one of the moments, sir."

"You might, if you could recognize your opportunity. Is it important?"

"Very. That's no idle assertion, I assure you. He

only knows the truth of a certain matter, the solution of which affects many people."

"Well, you can try. I give you little hope. An attendant must be within reach. There's no calculating the next crazy impulse in such cases."

An attendant took me in charge and convoyed me to the infirmary—a cleanly bare room, with a row of bedsteads headed against a distempered wall, and nailed to the latter over each patient's pillow, a diagnosis of his disease and its treatment, like a descriptive label in a museum.

Some of the beds were occupied; a convalescent pallid figure or two lingered about the sunny windows at the end of the room, and seated solitary before the fire was the foundering wreck of George White.

The attendant briefly said, "That's him," and, retiring a short distance away, leaned against a bedstead rail. I fetched a chair from the wall and sat myself down by the poor shattered ruin.

A hopeless vacuity reigned in his expression at first, and presently he began to maunder and dribble forth a liquid patter of words all unintelligible.

By and by some connectedness was apparent in his wanderings. I stooped my head to listen.

"He's alone and asleep—the only one. Time to try—sarfly, now—a fut i' the toe-hole wi' caution—and I'm up and out. Curse the crumbling clay. Ah! a bit's fell on him! My God, what a grin! One eye's open! If I cud sweat to moisten it, now! I'm dry wi' fire and dust! I'm farlin' back—I'm——"

He half-rose to his feet; I put out a hand to control him, but he sunk down again and into apathy in a moment.

A few minutes and the stream of words was flowing once more.

"Not so deep—not so deep, arter all. The tails o' the warms wriggles on the coffin, while their heads be stuck out i' the blessed air. Two fut, I make it. I cud putt my harnd through, so be as this cruel lid would heist up. It's breaking—the soil's coming through the cracks.

It's pouring in and choking me—it's choking me, I say. Isn't there none to hear? Why, I'm sinking! The sub-soil's dropped in! I shall be ten fut down and no chance if——"

Again the struggle; again the collapse; and by and by, the monotonous murmur gathering volume as it proceeded.

"Sing, says you—and the devil drums i' the pit if I so much as whisper. Look'ee ther—at the white square o' the sky. Thart's what keeps me going. If you was to blot thart out, he'd have me by the hip wi' a pinch like a bloodhound's jaw. There's summut darkens! Who's thart a-looking down? Why, you bloody murderer, I knows you! I found you out, I did, you ugly cutthroat devil. Already dead, says you? Who kills dead men? There bain't a thing i' the warld I'd hold my tongue for but drink—you gie it me, then. What's this? The bottle's swarming wi' maggots—arnts, black arnts. You're a rare villain! Not a doctor, I say. A doctor don't cut the weasands o' dead men and let out the worms—millions of them—and there's some wi' faces and shining rings and gewgaws. The ungodly shall go down into the pit—help me out o' it—they're burying me alive!"

He leaped to his feet, with drawn, ashy face. The watchful attendant was at his side in a moment and had put a restraining hand on him.

"You'll get nought out of him, sir," he said. "It's my belief he'll never utter sane word again."

As he spoke the sexton's eyes lighted on me in their wild roving, steadied, flickered and took a little glint of reason. Still gazing at me, he sunk into his chair again.

"Leave us alone for a minute," I said to the man. "He seems to recognize me, I think."

"As long as his eyes don't wander, maybe," he answered. "Keep 'em fixed on you"—and he withdrew to his former standpoint.

"George," I said, in a low, distinct voice, "do you know me?"

I held him with an intense gaze. He seemed struggling in an inward agony to escape it.

"George," I said again, "do you know who I am?"

"The grave yon, where no grass grows," he muttered.

"Yes, yes. Why doesn't it grow there?"

"Ask the——"

"Ask whom? I'm listening."

"It's he—oh, my God!"

I saw the terror creep and flutter behind the surface of his skin. I saw it leap out and heard a yell, as his eyes escaped their thralldom; and on the instant the attendant was there and struggling with him.

In the shock of it I jumped up and turned—and saw Dr. Crackenthorpe standing in the doorway.

I ran at him in a sort of frenzy.

"What do you want?" I cried; "what are you here for?"

I think I was about to strike him, when the wizened figure of the doctor who had given me permission to enter thrust itself between us.

"What's all this?" he said, in a sharp, grating voice. "How dare you make this uproar, sir?"

I fell back, shaking with rage. All down the row of beds pale sick faces had risen, looking on in wonder. Beside the fire my escort was still struggling with the madman.

"What right has he to be here—to come and spy upon me?" I cried.

"This is simply outrageous! Dr. Crackenthorpe" (he glanced at the newcomer with no very flattering expression) "is here to superintend the removal of a patient of his. He must be protected from insult. I rescind my permit. Johnson, see this man off the premises."

A second attendant advanced and took me, police fashion, by the elbow. I offered no resistance. Impulse had made a fool of me, and I felt it.

The sound of the scuffle by the fire still continued. As I passed Dr. Crackenthorpe he made me a mocking bow, hat in hand. Then, waving me aside as if I were some

troublesome supplicant he desired to ignore, he advanced further into the room.

Then came a sudden thud and loud exclamation, at which both I and my attendant turned.

The madman had bested his enemy and dashed him to the floor. A moment then he paused, his gasping mouth and pale eyes indicative of his terror of the man approaching—a moment only, and he turned and fled. I was conscious of a sudden breaking out of voices—of a fearful screech ringing above them—of a hurried rush of shapes—of a bound and crash and shattering snap of glass. It all happened in an instant, and there was a jagged and gaping fissure in a window at the end of the room—and George White was gone.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A QUIET WARNING.

I fully expected to be summoned as a witness to the inquest held on George White. However, as it turned out, they left me alone, and for that I was thankful, though indeed I had little to fear from any cross-examination; and Dr. Crackenthorpe would hardly have ventured under the circumstances to use his professional influence to my discomfiture, seeing that I had shown knowledge of the fact that between him and the dead man was once, at least, some species of understanding. So he gave his version of the affair, without any reference to me, who indeed could hardly in any way be held responsible for the catastrophe.

And now he lay dead, the latest victim of the inquisition of the wheel, I most fully believed; a poor wretch withered under its ban that would reach, it seemed, to agents but remotely connected with the dark history of its immediate neighbors. He was dead, and with him, I could but think, had passed my one chance of probing the direful mystery in that direction where the core of it festered.

Thereafter for weeks I walked in a stubborn rebellion against fate, intensified by the thought that this stultifying of my purpose had come upon me on the heels of my triumphant mastery of that old weird influence of the mill—a triumph that had seemed to pronounce me the very chosen champion of truth to whom all ways to the undoing of the wicked should be revealed.

But, now, as the month drew to its close, a new anxiety came to humble me with the pathos of the world, and to assimilate all restless emotions into one pale fog of silence, gray and sorrowful.

On a certain morning, looking in my father's face when I brought him his breakfast, I read something there, the import of which I would not consider or dwell upon until I could escape and commune with myself alone.

There was little external change in him and he was bright and cheerful. It was only a certain sudden sense of withdrawal that struck a chill into me—a sense as if life, seeking to steal unobserved from its ancient prison, knew itself noticed and affected to be dallying simply with the rusted locks and bolts.

Realizing this presently to the full, I determined then and there to put everything else to one side and to devote myself single-handed to the tender ministering to his last days upon earth. And grief and sadness were mingled in me, for I loved the old man and could not but rejoice that the inevitable should come to him so peacefully. But prospect of the utter loneliness that would fall upon me when he was gone woke a selfish resentment that he should be taken from me and fought in my heart for mastery over the better emotion.

Did he know? Not certainly, perhaps, for slowly dying men give little thought to the way they wander. But something in the prospect opening out before him must, I think, have struck him with a dawning marvel at its strangeness; as a sleeper, wakened from a weird romance of dreaming, finds a wonder of unfamiliarity in the world restored to him.

It may have been that some increase of care on my

part making itself apparent was the first warning to him that all was not as it used to be, for there came a night when he called to me as I was leaving his room—after seeing him comfortably established—in a voice with a queer ring of emotion in it.

"What is it, dad?" I asked, hurrying back to his bedside.

"I'm wakeful to-night, my lad; well and easy, but wakeful."

"Shall I stop with you a bit longer?"

I saw he wished it and sat myself down upon the foot of the bed.

"Good lad," he said. "I don't deserve all this, Renalt. It should be a blank and empty thing to review a life spent in idleness and self-indulgence. I ought to feel that, and yet I'm at peace. Why wasn't I of your militant philosophers, who treating love like any other luxury, find salve for the bitter sting of it in a brave independence of righteousness!"

"As well ask, dad, why in battle the bullets spare some and mangle others."

"You mean the faculty of overriding fate is constitutional, not a courageous theory, Renalt?"

"Yet I think your philosopher would be the first to acknowledge its truth."

"Of course. He'd have a principle to prove. But I can't gather consolation there for having wittingly sunk myself to the beasts."

"Dad!"

"Why should I mince matters? Let me look at you full face. I have never been a liar, but I've chosen to deceive myself into the belief that mere brute self-indulgence was a fine revolt against the tyranny of the gods."

"It may have been nature's counter-irritant to unbearable suffering."

"Sophistry, my boy. It's out of the kindness of your heart, but it's sophistry. Better to die shrieking under the knife than to live to be a hopeless, disfigured cripple."

Look at me lying here. What heritage of virtue, what example of endurance, shall I leave to my children?"

"You have never complained."

"No comfort, Renalt—none. I nursed my resentment from base fear only that by revealing it, it would dissipate. With such a belief I have to face the Supreme Court up there; and"—he looked at me earnestly—"before very long, I think."

I shook my head in silence. I could find no word to say.

"Am I afraid?" he went on, still intently regarding me. "I think not—at present. Yet I have some bitter charges to answer."

"This rest will restore you again, dad."

He did not seem to hear me. His eyes left my face and he continued in a murmuring voice:

"The last dispossession the old suffer is sleep, it seems. Balm in Gilead—balm in Gilead!"

"What little breath will keep the spark alive," I thought as I sat and watched the worn quiet figure. The face looked as if molded out of wax and so moved me that presently I must rise and bend over it, thinking the end had actually come while I watched.

With my rising, however, a sigh broke from it, and a little stir of the limbs, so that my heart that had fallen leaped up again with gladness. Then he looked up at me standing above him, and a smile passed like a gleam of sunlight over his features.

"I always loved you, my son Renalt," he murmured, and, murmuring, fell into a light trance once more.

The following day there was no change in his condition. I could have thought him floating out of life on that tide of dreaming thoughts that seemed to bear him up so gently and so easily. When, at moments, he would rise to consciousness of my presence, he would nod to me and smile; and again sink back on the pillow of gracious somnolence.

I had been sitting reading to myself in my father's room and all was glowing silence about me, when a sudden clap at the window-casement made me start. I jumped

to my feet and looked out. A vast gloomy curtain of cloud was drawing up from the east; even as I looked, some shafts of its bitterness drove through the joints of the lattice, stabbing at me with points of ice, and I shivered, though the sunlight was still upon me.

The storm came on with incredible speed; within five minutes of my rising clouds of hail were flogging the streets, and from a whirling fog of night jangle of innumerable voices hooting and whistling broke like a besieging cloud of Goths upon the ancient capital.

CHAPTER L.

STRICKEN DOWN.

For ten minutes, during which the city was blind with hail, I could see nothing but a thicket of white strings dense as the threads in a loom; hear nothing but the pounding crash of thunder and fierce hiss and clatter of the driving stones. Then darkness gathered within and without, and down came the storm with an access of fury that seemed verily as if it must flatten out the town like a scattered ants' nest.

So infernal for the moment was the uproar that I hurried to my father's side, fearful that his soul might actually yield itself to the raging tyranny of its surroundings.

He lay unmoved in the same quiet stupor of the faculties, unconscious, apparently, that anything out of nature's custom was enacting near him.

As suddenly as it had begun, the white deluge ceased, as though the last of its reservoirs above were emptied. The reaction to comparative silence was so intense that in the first joy of it one scarcely harkened to the voice of a great wind that had risen and was following on the heels of the storm, to batten like a camp follower on the wreckage of the battle that had swept by. For four weary days it flew, going past like an endless army, and

laden clouds were its parks of artillery and the swords of its bitterness never rested in their scabbards.

On that first evening, when the hailstorm had passed and light was restored, I was standing by the window looking out on the bridge and the street all freckled with white, when a low moaning sound came to my ears. I turned sharply round, thinking it was my father, but he lay peaceful and motionless. I hurried to the door and opened it, and there in the passage outside was old Peggy, cast down upon her face, and groaning and muttering in a pitiful manner.

I gave her a little ungallant peck with my foot.

"Now!" I cried, "what's this? What are you doing?"

Her face was hidden on her arm and she spoke up mumbly.

"Oh!" she said; "Lord—Lord! It bain't worthy o' you!"

"What's the matter, I say?"

"Take the clean and well-preserved! There's better fish than a poor feckless old 'ooman all fly blown like a carkis wi' ungodliness!"

I gave her another little stir.

"I repent!" she shrieked. "I'll confess everything! Only spare me now. Gie me a month—two months, to prepare my sore wicked soul for the felon's grave."

"Peggy," I said, sternly, "get up and don't make a fool of yourself."

She seemed to listen.

"Is that you, Renalt?" she said, presently.

"Get up—do you hear?"

"Keep the bolt fro' me. Pray to the Lord for a bad old 'ooman. Wrastle for me, Renalt."

"Are you crazy?"

She bumped her elbows on the floor as she lay, in fretful terror.

"Wrastle—wrastle!" she whined. "Don't waste your breath on axing things. While you talk He enters."

"Who enters?"

"The Lord of hosts. I saw His face at the window, and the breath o' His nostrils was like the sound o' guns.

I arlays meant to repent—I swear it on the blessed book. It's a wicked thing to compact wi' the prince o' darkness. Believe me, truth, I arlays meant it, but the pot must be boiled and the beds made and where were old Peggy's time? You wudn't smite a body, Lord, for caring of her dooties, and I repent now. It's never too late over one sinner doing penance. Oh, Lord, take the young and well-favored and gie crass Rottengoose a month for her sins!"

"Peggy, I haven't a doubt you've plenty to do penance for. But have you really the stupendous assurance to think that all this storm is got up on your account? Get up, you old idiot! The thunder's past and there's nothing to be afraid of now."

Her lean body went in with a great sigh. For some moments she lay as she was; then cautiously twisted her head and peered up at me.

"Sakes alive!" she muttered, listening. "Was it all for nowt, then?"

I saw the craft come back to her withered eyes in the dusk.

"Heave me up, Renalt," she said. "The Lord has seen the wisdom o' let alone, praise to His mercy."

"Don't presume on that, Peggy. He'll call to you at His own time, though it mayn't be through a thunder-storm."

"Look to yourself, Renalt. The young twigs snap easiest. You may be the first to go, wi' the load o' guilt you gathered in London yon for company."

"Very likely. You asked me to pray for you just now, you know. What's on your mind, Peggy Rottengoose?"

I had the old sinner to her feet by this time. Her face was a yellow, haggard thing to look at—shining like stained brass. Something in it seemed to convey to me that perhaps after all the angel of the storm had struck at her in passing.

She looked at me morosely and fearfully.

"What but ministering to Satan's children?" she said.

"You graceless old villain, I've a mind to pitch you into the race."

I made a clutch at her as I spoke, but she evaded me with a wriggle and a shrill screech.

"I didn't mean it! Let me go by!"

"What have you got to repent of in the first place?"

"I was stealing the pictur' o' Modred—there! No peace ha' I had since I done it!"

I let the old liar pass, and she shuffled away, hugging herself and glancing round at me once or twice as if she still doubted the meaning of my threat. I paid no more attention to her, but returned to my father's room.

The old man lay on his back placid and unconcerned, but his eyes were open and he greeted me with a cheerful little nod.

Darkness deepened in the room, and the white face on the pillow became a luminous spot set weirdly in the midst of it. I had not once till then, I think, admitted a single feeling of disloyalty toward my father to my heart. Now a little unaccountable stirring of impatience and resentment awoke in me. I was under some undefinable nervous influence, and was surely not true to myself in the passing of the mood. It seemed suddenly a monstrous thing to me that he, the prime author of all that evil destiny that had haunted our lives, should be fading peacefully toward the grave, while we must needs live on to outface and adjust the ugly heritage of responsibilities that were the fruits of his selfish policy of inaction.

Such sudden swift reactions from a long routine of endurance are humanly inevitable. They may flame up at a word, a look, a shying thought—the spark of divinity glowing with indignation over intolerable injustice. Then the dull decorum of earth stamps it under again and we go on as before.

During that spell of rebellion, my soul passed in review the incidents of a cruel visitation of a father's sins upon his children. I saw the stunted minds meanly nurtured in an atmosphere of picturesque skepticism. I saw the natural outgrowth of this in a reckless indifference to individual responsibility. Following thereon came one

by one the impulse to triumph by evil—the unchecked desire—the shameless deed—the road, the river and the two lonely graves.

I rose to my feet and paced the room to and fro, casting a resentful glance now and again at the quiet figure on the bed. Driven to quick desperation I strode to the door, opened it and descended the stairs.

In the blaze of my anger I burst into the haunted room, thinking to stay the monster with the mere breath of my fury. But the cold blackness drove at me, and, for all my confidence, repelled me on the very threshold.

I rushed away to the sluice, let it fall and shut off the race. Then I returned, breathless and panting, and looked at the open door.

"You're a very material devil," I muttered; "a boy could silence your voice, for all its boastfulness."

As I spoke, again a little ugly secret laugh seemed to issue from it. Probably it was only an expiring screech of the axle, but it made my blood run tingling for all that.

I mounted the stairs, determinedly crushing down the demon of fear that sought to unman me.

"I have silenced its hateful voice," I cried to myself, and whispered it again as I re-entered my father's room.

The old man lay silent and motionless as I seated myself once more by the window. Now the great blasts of tempest held monopoly of the ghostly house, unpierced of that other voice that had been like the grinding of the teeth of the storm.

Presently I heard him stirring restlessly in his bed, and little fitful moans came from his lips. His uneasiness increased; he muttered and threw his arms constantly into fresh positions. Could it be that my untoward silencing of that voice that for such long years had been his counselor and familiar was making a vacancy in his soul into which deadlier demons were stealing?

I moved to the bed and looked down upon him. As I did so the old tenderness reasserted itself and the mood of blackness passed away. If he had bequeathed to us a

dark heritage of suffering, it is by suffering that the soul climbs from the bestial pitfalls of the senses.

As I leaned down to cover his chest that his restless tossing had bared, a second tempest of hail swept furiously upon the town. I ran to the window and looked out. In the flashing radiance of the lamp that stood upon the bridge opposite—for night was now settled upon the city—I saw the tumult of white beat upon the stones and rebound from them and thrash all the road, as it were, with froth.

Suddenly a figure started up in the midst of the flickering curtain of ice. It was there in a moment—waving its wild arms—wringing its hands—shrieking, I could have fancied, though no sound came to me. But, in the wonder and instant of its rising, I knew it to be Duke's.

Hardly had I mastered the first shock of surprise when there came the sound of a great cry behind me. I turned, and there was my father sitting up in bed, and his face was ghastly.

"The wheel!" he shrieked, in a suffocating voice; "the wheel! I'm under it!" And fell back upon his pillow.

CHAPTER LI.

A MEETING ON THE BRIDGE.

It was not immediate death that had alighted, but death's forerunner, paralysis. I realized this in a moment. The mute and stricken figure; the closed eyes; the darkly flushed face wrenched to the right and the flapping breath issuing one-sided from the lips—I needed no experience to read the meaning of these.

I ran to the head of the stairs and shrieked to old Peggy to come up. Then I hurried to the dressing-table and lighted a candle that stood thereon. As I took it in my hand to approach the bed, a pane in the lattice behind me went with a splintering noise, and something whizzed past my head like a hornet, and a fragment of plaster

spun from the wall near. At the same instant a little muffled sound, no louder in the tumult of hail than the smack of an elastic band on paper, came from the street outside.

Instinctively I winced and dodged, not knowing for the moment what had happened, then in the midst of my distraction, fury seized me like a snake.

The blind was up; my figure plainly visible from the bridge as I crossed the room. The madman outside had shot at me, whether from pure devilry or because he took me for Jason I neither knew nor cared. Coming on the head of my trouble, the deed seemed wantonly diabolical. Had I been master of my actions I think I should then and there have rushed forth and grappled with the evil creature and crushed the life out of him. As it was I ran to the window and dashed it open and leaned forth.

He was there on the bridge still; standing up in the pelting storm; bare-headed, fantastic—a thing of nameless expression.

I shrieked to him and cursed him. I menaced him with my fists. For the moment I was near as much madman as he.

Perhaps some words of my outcry reached him through the hurtling of the storm. Perhaps he recognized me, for I saw him shrink down and cower behind the stones of the bridge. I rattled to the window, pulled down the blind and turned myself to the stricken figure on the bed. As I did so old Peggy came breathing and shambling into the room.

"What's to do?" she said, coughing feebly and glaring at me. "What's to do, Renalt?"

"Look there! What's happened—what's the matter with him? It is death, perhaps!"

She shuffled to the bedside, holding in her groaning chest with one hand. For a minute she must have stood gazing down.

"Ay," she said at last, leering round at me. "The Lord mistook the room, looking in at winder. Ralph it

was were wanted—not old Peggy, praise to His goodness.”

“Is he dying?”

“Maybe—maybe not yet awhile. The dumbstroke have tuk him.”

“Paralysis?”

“So they carls it. Better ax the doctor.”

“Look you to him, then, and look well, while I run out to seek for one. I leave him in your charge.”

I took her by the arm and stared in her face as I spoke. My expression must have been frowning and threatening, but indeed I mistrusted the old vagabond. She shrunk from me with a twitch of fear.

“He’ll come round wi’ his face to the judgment,” she said; and I left her standing by the bedside and hurried from the house.

Leaving the yard, I turned sharply round upon the bridge. The storm had yielded, but the ground was yet thickly strewed with white. Not a soul seemed to be abroad. Only low down against the parapet of the bridge was a single living thing, and it crouched huddled as if the storm had claimed a victim before it passed.

My brain still burned with fury over the foul action that had so nearly sent me from my father in his utmost need. I could think of nothing at the moment but revenge, of nothing but that I must sweep this horror into the river before I could hope to deal collectedly with the fatality that had befallen me. I only feared that it would escape me, and leaped on it, mad with rage.

I tore him up to his feet and held him from me with a savage gaze, and he looked at me with a dark, amazed stare, but there was no terror in his eyes. And even as I held him I saw in the dim lamplight how worn and haggard he had grown, how sunken was his white face, how fearfully the monomania of revenge had rent him with its jagged teeth.

“You dog!” I said. “You end in the millrace here—do you understand? You are a murderer in will and would have been in deed if your aim had answered true to your devil’s heart! Down with you!”

I closed with him, but he still struggled to hold me off.

"I thought it was he—the other. He's left London. He must be here somewhere."

There was no deprecation in his tone. He spoke in a small dry voice and with an air as if none could doubt that he was justified in his pursuit and must stand aside or suffer by it rather than that it should cease.

"Where he is I neither know nor care," I answered, set and stern. "You've raised your hand to me at last, dog that you are, and that's my concern. I should have known at first—that it's useless arguing mercy with a devil."

I had my arms round him like steel bands. Once he might have been my match, or better, but not now in his state of physical degeneration.

"Yes, end it," he whispered. "I always thought to die by water as she did. The chase here is exhausting me. I can finish my task more effectively from the other side the grave."

I gave a mocking laugh.

"You shall purge your hate in fire, there," I said. "Ghostly revenge on the living is an old wives' tale."

He struggled to force an arm free and pointed down at the foaming mill-tail.

"There's a voice there," he cried, "that says otherwise. I read it, and so do you, for all your shaking heroics. Fling me down! I escape the self-destruction that was to come. Fling me down and end it!"

I tightened my arms about him. The first desperate fury of my mood was leading me and with it the impulse to murder. The wan, once-dear features were appealing to me against their will and mine.

Suddenly, while I wavered, an appalling screech burst from him; he wrenched himself free of me with one mad superhuman effort, struck out at the empty air, and turned and fled across the bridge and up toward the hill beyond. In a moment he was lost to sight in the darkness.

In the shock of his escape I twisted about to see what

had so moved him—and, not a yard behind me, was standing Dr. Crackenthorpe.

For many seconds we stared at one another speechless and motionless. His face was pale and set very grimly.

At last he spoke, and "Murder!" was the word he muttered.

"He runs fast for a murdered man," I said, with a sneer.

"Who was it?" he said, gazing with a strange, fixed expression up the dark blown hill.

"A ghost," I answered, with a reckless laugh. "The town is full of them to-night."

He looked at me gloomily. I could have thought he shivered slightly.

"Do you know him?"

"He was my friend once. Stand out of my way. I've an errand on hand. My father's had a seizure."

"Had a—come, I'll go see him."

"You won't. I won't have you near him. Stand out of my way."

"You're a fool. Promptness is everything in such cases."

I hesitated. For what his professional opinion was worth, this man had always stood to us as adviser in such small ailments as we suffered. I had no notion where to seek another. My father would be unconscious of his presence. At least he could pronounce upon the nature of the stroke.

"Very well," I said, ungraciously. "You can see him and judge what's the matter."

The old man was lying as I had left him when we entered the bedroom. His eyes were still closed, and his breathing sounded hard and stertorous.

"He's mortal bad, sir," Peggy said. "He'll die hard, I do believe."

Dr. Crackenthorpe waved her away and bent over the prostrate figure. As he did so its eyelids seemed to flicker, as if with dread consciousness of his approach.

"Be quick!" I said. "What has happened?"

He felt the dying pulse; bent his yellow face and listened at the heart. He was some minutes occupied.

Presently he rose and came to me, all formal and professional.

"You must prepare for the worst," he said. "He may speak again by and by, but I doubt it. In my opinion it is a question of a few days only. No medical skill can avail."

"Is there nothing I can do?"

"Nothing."

He bowed to me stiffly.

"I am at your service," he said, in a cold voice. "If I can be of any further use to you, you will let me know. You are not ignorant of where to find me, I believe."

He was walking to the door, but turned and came toward me again.

"That one-time friend of yours," he said. "Is he stopping in the town?"

"I really don't know, Dr. Crackenthorpe. I met him by chance, and you saw he ran from me. You seem interested in him."

"He—yes; he struck me as bearing a likeness to a—to a patient I once attended. Good night."

CHAPTER LII.

A WRITTEN WORD.

My escape from that strong net of fatality that had enmeshed so many years of my still young life, had been, it seemed, only a merciful respite. Now the toils, regathering about me again, woke a spirit of hopeless resignation in me that had been foreign to my earlier mood of resistance. Man has made of himself so plodding an animal as to almost resent the unreality of his brief vacations. He eats his way, like a wood-boring larva, through a monotonous tunnel of routine, satisfied with the thought that some day he may emerge into the

light on the other side, ready-winged for flight to the garden of paradise. Perhaps Lazarus was humanly far-seeing in refusing the rich man a drop of water. It would have made the poor wretch's after lot tenfold more unendurable.

Now a feeling came over me that I could struggle no more, but would lie in the web and suffer unresisting the onsets of fate. My father's seizure; Duke's reappearance and his hint as to the visit I was to expect from Jason; the sudden flight of the cripple before the vision of Dr. Crackenthorpe—all these were strands about my soul with which I would concern myself no longer. I would do my duty, so far as I could, and set my face in one direction and glance aside no more.

That night I ordered Peggy to bed—for since Jason's going she slept in the house—and myself passed the dreary vigil of the hours by my father's side. Indeed, for the three days following I scarcely lay down at all, but took my food in snatches and slept by fits and starts in chairs or window-corners as occasion offered.

During the whole of this time the condition of the patient never altered. He lay on his back, breathing crookedly from his twisted mouth; his eyes closed; the whole of the right side of his body stricken motionless. His left hand he would occasionally move and that was the single sign of animate life he showed.

And day and night the wind blew and the hail and rain came down in a cold and ceaseless deluge. The whole country was flooded, I heard, and the streams risen, but still the rending storm flew and added devastation to misery.

It was on the afternoon of the third day that, chancing to look at the old man as I sat by his bedside, I saw, with a certain shock of pleasure, that his eyes were open and fixed upon my face. I jumped to my feet and leaned over him, and at that some shadow of emotion passed across his features, as if the angel of death stood between him and the window.

Presently his left hand, that lay on the coverlet, began moving. The fingers twitched with a beckoning motion

and he raised his arm several times and let it fall again listlessly. I fancied I was conscious of some dumb appeal addressed to me, toward which my own soul yearned in sympathy. Yet, strive as I would, I could not interpret it. An inexpressible trouble seemed lost and wandering in the fathomless depths of the eyes; passionate utterance seemed ever hovering on the lips, ever escaping the grasp of will and sliding back into blackness.

"Dad," I said, "what is it? Try to express by a sign and I will try to understand."

The hand rose again, weakly fluttered in the air and dropped upon the coverlet. Thrice the effort was made and thrice I failed to interpret its significance. Then a little quivering sigh came from the mouth and the eyes closed in exhaustion.

I racked my brains for the meaning of the sign. Some trouble, it was evident, sought expression, but what—what—what? My mind was all dulled and confused by the incidents of the last few days.

While I was vainly struggling for a solution old Peggy entered the room with tea and bread and butter for my afternoon meal. She paused with the tray in her hands, watching the blind groping of the fingers on the bed.

"Ay," she said, "but I doubt me ye cudn't hold a pen, master."

I turned sharply to her.

"Is that what he wants?"

"Pen or pencil—'tis a'rl one. When speech goes, we talk wi' the fingers."

What a fool I had been! The sign I had struggled in vain for hours to read, this uncanny old beldame had understood at a glance.

I hurried out of the room and returned with paper and pencil. I thrust the latter between the wandering fingers and they closed over it with a quick, weak snap. But they could not retain it, and it slipped from them again upon the coverlet. A moan broke from the lips and the arm beat the clothes feebly.

"Heave en up," said the old woman. "He's axing ye to."

I put my arm under my father's shoulders and with a strong effort got him into a sitting posture, propped among the pillows. I placed the pencil in his hand again and held the paper in such position that he could write upon it. He succeeded in making a few hieroglyphic scratches on the white surface and that was all.

"It's no manner o' use, Renalt," said Peggy. "Better lat en alone and drink up your tea."

"Put it down there and leave us to ourselves."

The old creature did as she was bidden and shuffled from the room grumbling.

I placed the paper where my father's hand could rest upon it, and sat down to my silent meal.

Presently, watching, as I ate, the weak restless movements of the hand upon the quilt, a thought occurred to me, which then and there I resolved to put into practice. It was evident that, unless through an unexpected renewal of strength, those dying fingers would never succeed in forming a legible word with the pencil they could barely hold. But they could make a sign of themselves and that little power I must seek to direct.

I hurried down to the kitchen and seized from the wall an ancient bone tablet that Peggy used for domestic memoranda. Scraping a little soot from the chimney I mixed it with water into a thick paste and spread a thin layer of the latter over the surface of the tablet. It dried almost immediately, and writing on it with the tip of my finger, I found that the soot came readily away, leaving the mark I had made stenciled white and clear under the upper coating.

Returning to my father, with this extemporized first principle and the saucer of black paste, I held the tablet before his dim, wandering eyes, and wrote on it with my finger, demonstrating the method. At first he hardly seemed to comprehend my meaning, but, after a repetition or two his glance concentrated and his forehead seemed to ripple into little wrinkles of intelligence. At that I smeared the surface of the bone afresh, waited a minute for it to dry, and placed it under his hand upon

the bed, leaving him to evolve the method from his poor crippled inner consciousness.

But a few moments had elapsed when a small, low sound from the bed brought me to my father's side.

He looked from me to the tablet, where it lay, and there was a strained imploring line between his eyes. Gently I took up the little black square and I saw that something was formed on it. With infinite toil, for it was only his left hand he could use, he had scratched on it a single, straggling word, and in the fading light I read it:

"Forgive."

"Father!" I cried; "is that what you have been striving to say?"

He dragged up his unstricken arm slowly into an attitude as if the hand sought its fellow to join it in a prayer to me.

"Before God," I said, "you wrong me to think I could say that word! What have I to forgive you for? My sins have been my own, and they have met with their just reward. Am I to forgive you for loving me? Dad—dad! I have known so little love that I can't afford to wrong yours by a thought. Look! I will blot this out, that you may know my heart has nothing but tenderness in it for you!"

I snatched up the tablet and smeared out the cruel word and placed the blank surface under his hand again. He was looking at me all the time with the same dim anguished expression, and now his head sunk back on the pillow and a tear rolled down his face.

Night came upon me sitting there, and presently, overcome by emotion and weariness, I fell over upon the foot of the bed and sunk into a profound sleep. For hours I lay unconscious and it was broad day in the room when I awoke with a sudden start.

Realizing in a moment how I had betrayed my vigil, I leaped to my feet with a curse at my selfishness and looked down upon my father. He was lying back, sunk in a wan exhausted sleep, and under its influence his

features seemed to have somewhat resumed their normal expression.

But it appeared he had again been scrawling on the tablets, with the first of the dawn, probably; and these were the broken words thereon that stared whitely up at me:

"I murd Mored."

CHAPTER LIII.

AN ATTEMPT AND A FAILURE.

For a minute or more I must have stood gazing down on the damning words, unmoving, breathless almost. Then I glanced at the quiet face on the pillow and back again to the tablet I held in my hand.

I am glad to know—proud, in the little pride I may call mine—that at that supreme moment I stood stanch; that I cried to myself: "It is a lie, born of his disease! He never did it!" That I dashed the tablet back upon the bed and that my one overwhelming thought was: "How may I defend this poor soul from himself?"

That he might die in peace with his conscience—that was the end of my desire. Yet how was I, knowing so little, to convince him? Disproof I had none, but only assurance of sympathy and a moral certainty that a nature so constituted could never lend itself to so horrible a deed.

In the midst of my confusion of thought a sudden idea woke in me and quickened into a resolve. I went swiftly out of the room, down the stairs, and walked in upon old Peggy mumbling her bread and milk in the kitchen. I was going out for awhile, I told her, and bade her listen for any sound upstairs that might betoken uneasiness on the part of the patient.

For the time being there was no rain to greet me as I stepped outside, but the wind still blew boisterously from the east, and the sky was all drawn and wrapt in a doleful swaddle of cloud. Sternly and without hesitation I made

my way to the house of Dr. Crackenthorpe. An anaemic, cross-looking servant girl was polishing what remained of the handle of the front door with a tattered doeskin glove.

"Is the doctor inside?" I said to her.

She left the glove sticking on the handle like a frouzy knocker, and stood upright looking down upon me.

"What do you want with him?" she said.

"I wish to see him on private business."

"He's at his breakfast. He won't thank you for troubling him now."

"I don't want him to thank me. I wish to see him, that's all."

"Well, then, you can't—and that's all."

I pushed past her and walked into the hall and she followed me clamoring.

The ugly voice I knew well called from a back room I had not yet been into: "What's that?"

I turned the handle and walked in. He was seated before a stained and dented urn of copper, and a great slice of toast from which he had just bitten a jagged semi-circle was in his hand.

"I told him you was at breakfast," said the cross girl, "but nothing 'ud suit his lordship but to drive his elbow into my chest and walk in."

She emphasized her little lie with a pressure of her hand upon the presumably wounded part.

"Assault and battery," said the doctor, showing his teeth. "Get out of my house, fellow."

"After I've had a word with you."

"Eh? Edith, go and fetch a constable."

"Certainly," I said. "The very thing I should like. I'll wait here till he comes."

He called to the girl as she was running out: "Wait a bit! Leave the fellow with me and shut the door."

She obeyed sulkily and we were alone together.

He went on with his breakfast with an affectation of unconcern and took no notice of me whatever.

"I believe you wished me to let you know, Dr. Crackenthorpe, if I should be in further need of your services?"

He swallowed huge gulps of tea with an unpleasant noise, protruding his lips like a gargoyle, but answer made he none.

"I am in need of your services."

He dissected the leg of a fowl with professional relish, but did not speak. In a gust of childish anger that was farcical I nipped the joint between finger and thumb and threw it into the fire.

For an instant he sat dumfounded staring at his empty plate; then he scrambled to his feet and ran to the mantel-shelf all in a scurry of fury and began diving among the litter there and tossing it right and left.

"The pistol—the pistol!" he muttered, in a cracked voice. "Where is it? What have I done with it?"

"Never mind. You expect a fee for your services, I suppose?"

He slackened in his feverish search and I saw he was listening to me.

"You don't want to kill the goose with the golden eggs, I presume?" said I, coolly.

He twisted round and faced me.

"You have a rude boorish insistence of your own," he cried at me hoarsely. "But I suppose I must value it for what it's worth. It's the custom to ask a fee for professional services."

"You volunteered yours, you know."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Quite so," he said. "The matter lies with you."

"With you, I think. In visiting my father the other night you had no secret hope, I suppose, that we should pay you in the sort of coin you have already had too much of?"

"You insult me, sir."

"Unwittingly, I assure you. Will you answer me one question? Is there the remotest chance of my father recovering from this attack?"

"Not the remotest—not of his definitely rallying even, I should say."

"Is that only an opinion?"

"Bah! Miracles don't occur in surgery. He is practically a dead man, I tell you."

"Why do you adopt this attitude to me, then, if you have an eye to a particular sort of fee?"

"Perhaps I wanted proof that the old man was past levying toll on." A wicked smile wrinkled his mouth. "Perhaps I satisfied myself he was, and from you I expected no consideration or justice."

"You can leave that out of the question. A mere business contract is another matter, and that is what I come to propose."

"Oh, indeed!"

He said it with a sneer, but moved nevertheless nearer the table, so that we could talk without raising our voices.

"May I ask the nature of this stupendous contract?"

"I will tell you without asking. I make you this offer—to hand over to you all that remains of the treasure on one condition."

"And that is?"

"That you tell me how my brother Modred came by his death."

He gave a little start; then dropped his eyes, frowning, and drummed with his fingers on the table. I saw he understood; that he was groping in his mind for some middle course, whereby he could satisfy all parties and secure the prize for himself.

"If your father didn't do it," he was beginning, but I took him up at the outset.

"You know he didn't! It is a foul lie of such a man. Dr. Crackenthorpe"—my voice, despite my stubborn resolve, broke a little—"he is lying there on his deathbed, despairing, haunted with the thought that it was he who in a fit of drunken madness strangled the life in his own son. It is all hideous—monstrous—unnatural. You know more about it, I believe, than any man. You were sitting with him that night."

"But he left me awhile."

"You know it wasn't in his nature to do such a thing!"

"Pardon me. I have always looked upon your father as a dangerous, reckless fellow."

"I won't believe it. You know more than you will say—more than you dare to tell. Oh, if that churchyard fellow had only lived I would have had the truth by now."

"I hope so, though you do me the honor to hold me implicated with him in some absurd and criminal secret, and on the strength of a little delirious raving—not an uncommon experience in the profession, trust me."

"I don't appeal to your charity or your mercy. There's a rich reward awaiting you if you tell what you know and ease the old dying man's mind. Further than that—if you withhold the truth and let him pass in his misery, I swear that I'll never rest till I've dragged you down and destroyed you."

He bent his body in a mocking and ungainly bow.

"I really can't afford to temporize with my conscience for any one living or dead. As it is, I have allowed myself to slip into the position of an accomplice, which is an extreme concession on my part of friendly patronage toward a family that has certainly never studied to claim my good offices."

I looked at him gloomily. I could not believe even now that he would dismiss me without some by-effort toward the prize that he saw almost within his grasp; and I was right.

"Still," he went on, "I don't claim infallibility for my deduction. I shall be pleased, if you wish it, to return with you and if possible to question the patient."

I was too anguished and distraught to reject even this little thread of hope. Perhaps it was in me that at the last moment the sight of that stricken figure at home might move the cold cynicism of the man before me to some weak warmth of charity.

He bade me wait in the hall while he finished his breakfast and I had nothing for it but to go and sit down under the row of smoky prints.

He kept me a deliberate while, and then came forth leisurely and donned his brown coat, that was hanging like a decayed pirate beside me. We walked out together.

The mill greeted us with no jarring thunder as we en-

tered its door, for the discord of its phantom grinding I had myself silenced.

I listened as we climbed the wooden stairs for any sound from the room above, but only the echo of our footfalls reverberated in the lonely house.

No sign of old Peggy had I seen, but, when I pushed open the door of my father's room there she was standing by his bed and leaning over.

At the noise of our entrance she twisted her head, gave a sort of sudden pee-wit cry and tumbled upon the floor in a collapsed heap, the tablet from the bed in her hand.

CHAPTER LIV.

A LAST CONFESSION.

I thought that the old woman, startled by our entrance, had merely stepped back, tripped and so come to the ground; but the doctor uttered an exclamation, ran to the prostrate figure and called me to bring a spongeful of water from the wash-hand-stand.

When I had complied I saw that the ancient limbs were rigid; the teeth set, the lips foaming slightly. Peggy was in an epileptic fit and that at her age was no light matter.

I feared that her struggles might presently wake my father, who was to all appearance sleeping peacefully, and asked the doctor if it would not be possible to move her to another room. He shook his head, but gave no answer. Suddenly I was conscious that his eyes were fixed upon the tablet still held in her crooked fingers, and that in my distraction I had not erased the damning words that were traced thereon. The wet sponge was in my hand. With a quick movement I stooped and swept it across the surface. As I did so the doctor slewed his head round and smirked up at me with a truly diabolical expression. Then he snatched the sponge and plumped it with a slap on the withered forehead. The

soot from the tablet ran in wet streaks over the sinister old face and made a grotesque horror of it. The wretched creature moaned and jerked under the shock, as though the water were biting acid.

Not a word was spoken between us for full twenty minutes—not till the fit at length subsided and left the racked body to the rest of exhaustion. The eyes became human, with what humanity was left them; the pallid face fell into its usual lines—the old woman lay flat with closed lids in the extreme of debility.

Then said Dr. Crackenthorpe: "Take you her feet and I her head and we'll move her out of this."

We carried Peggy into my room and laid her on the bed that had been Jason's. Her hours must be numbered, I thought as I looked at the gray features, already growing spectral in the rising fog of death.

Turning from that old fallen stump, Dr. Crackenthorpe suddenly faced me, a smile on his cracked lips.

"So," he said, "on the top of that confession, you sought to convince me against your own judgment?"

"I haven't a thought to deny it. I value it at nothing. He has fed on a baseless chimera, at your instigation—yes, you needn't lie—till his mind is sick with disease. What does it matter? I know him and I stake my soul on his innocence. I asked you to ease his mind—not mine. I tell you in a word"—I strode up to him and spoke slowly and fiercely—"my father had no hand in Modred's death and I believe you know it."

He backed from me a little, breathing hard, when a sound from the bed stopped him. I started and turned. The old woman's hand was up to her neck. Her sick eyes were moving from the one to the other of us in a lost, questioning way; a murmur was in her lean, pulsing throat.

"Lie quiet, Peggy," I said; "you may be able to speak in a minute if you lie quiet."

The words seemed only to increase the panic in her. With a gurgling burst a fragment of speech came from her mouth:

"Be I passing?"

The doctor heard it. "Yes," he said, brutally.

She appeared to collapse and shrink inward; but in a moment she was up, leaning on her elbow, and her face was terrible to look at.

"'Twas I killed the boy!" she cried, with a sort of breathless wail; "tell him—tell Ralph," and so fell back, and I thought the life was gone from her.

Was I base and cruel in my triumph? I rose erect, indifferent to the tortured soul stretched beneath me.

"Who was right?" I cried. "Believe me now, you dog; and growl and curse your fill over the wreck of your futile villainy!"

His mouth was set in an incredulous grinning line. I brushed sternly past him, making for my father's room. I could not pause or wait a moment. The poor soul's long anguish should be ended there and then.

As I stooped over his bed I saw that some change had come upon him in sleep. The twist of his mouth was relaxed. His face had assumed something of its normal expression.

I seized up the tablet from where it had tumbled on the floor. I smeared it with a fresh coating from the saucer. His first waking eyes, I swore, should look upon the written evidence of his acquittal. While I was waiting for the stuff to dry, he stirred, murmured and opened his eyes.

"Renalt!" he said, in a very low, weak voice.

Speech had returned to him. I knelt by his side and passed my tremulous arms underneath him.

"Father," I said, "you can speak—you are awake again. I have something to tell you; something to say. Don't move or utter a sound. You have been asleep all this time—only asleep. While you were unconscious old Peggy has been taken ill—very ill. In the fear of death she has made a confession. Father, I saw what you wrote on this—look, on this tablet! It was all untrue; I have wiped it out. It was Peggy killed Mōdred—she has confessed it."

He lifted his unstricken hand—the other was yet paralyzed—in an attitude of prayer. Presently his hand

dropped and he turned his face to me, his eyes brimming with tears.

"Renalt," he murmured, in the poor shadow of a voice, "I thank my God—but the greater sin—I can never condone—though you forgive me—my son."

"Forgive? What have I to forgive, dad? My heart is as light as a feather."

He only gazed at me earnestly—pathetically. I went and sat by his side and smoothed his pillow and took his hand in mine.

"Now the incubus is gone, dad, and you'll get well. You must—I can't do without you. The black shadow is passed from the mill, and the coming days are all full of sunshine."

"What has she—confessed? How did—she—do it?"

"I didn't wait to hear. I wanted you to know, and left her the moment she had spoken."

"Alone?"

I hesitated and stammered.

"There," he said, with a faint smile, "I know—I know he's in the house. I don't fear—I don't fear—I tell you. I'm—past that. He won't want—to come in here?"

He spoke all this time in a bodiless, low tone, and the effort seemed to exhaust him. For some time I sat by him, till he fell into a light slumber. No sound was in the house, and I did not even know if Dr. Crackenthorpe had left the adjoining room. But when my father was settled down and breathing quietly, I rose and stepped noiselessly thither to see.

He was standing against the window, and turned stealthily round as I entered, watching me.

As I walked toward him I glanced aside at the bed. Something about the pose of the figure thereon brought me to a sudden stop. My heart rose and fell with a sharp, quick emotion, and in the instant of it I knew that the old woman was dead. Her head had been propped against the bolster, so that her chin rested upon her withered breast. That would never beat again to the impulse of fear or evil or any kinder emotion, for Peggy had answered to her name.

For the moment I stood stupefied. I think I had hardly realized that the end was so near. Sorrow I could not feel, but now regret leaped in me that I had not waited to hear all that she might tell. Only for an instant. On the next it flashed through me that it was better to put my trust in that first wild confession than to invite it by further questioning to self-condonation—perhaps actual denial.

"You went too soon," Dr. Crackenthorpe said, in a cold voice of irony. "I must tell you that was hardly decent."

"I never thought she had spoken her last."

"Nor had she—by a good deal."

"She said more?"

"Much more—and to a different purpose."

I stared at him, breathing hard.

"Are you going to lie again?" I muttered.

"That pleasantry is too often on your lips, sir," he said, coolly. "None doubt truth so much as those who have dishonored her. The dead woman there leaves you this as a legacy."

He thrust the thing he was holding into my hand. I recognized it in a sort of dull wonder. It was that ancient mutilated portrait of Modred that I had once discovered in Peggy's possession.

From the stained and riddled silhouette to the evil face of the man before me I glanced and could only wait in dumb expectancy.

"She told me where to find it," he said, "and I brought it to her."

"I never heard you move."

"I stepped softly for fear of disturbing your father. Do you see that outraged relic? The old creature's self-accusation turned upon it—upon that and nothing else."

"What do you mean?"

"That you must look elsewhere, I am afraid, for the criminal. Our pleasant Rottengoose shared the gross superstitions of her kind. All these years she has secretly hugged the really reprehensible thought that the boy's death was due to her."

"I don't understand."

"A base superstition, my friend—a very base superstition. She had in her possession, I understand, a flint shaft of the paleolithic period. There are plenty such to be picked up in the neighborhood. The ignorant call them elf arrowheads and cherish a belief that to mutilate with one of them a body's portrait or image is to compass that person's destruction. This harridan cherished no love for your brother, and fancied she saw her opportunity of seizing revenge without risk on a certain night of misfortune. The boy died and henceforth she knew herself as his murderess. Good morning to you. May I remind you that my fee is yet unpaid? I will certify to the present cause of death, with pleasure."

CHAPTER LV.

A SHADOW FROM THE PAST.

Like one in a dream I heard the doctor's footstep recede down the stairs and heard the yard door close dully on him as he left the house. In my suffering soul I felt one cruel shaft rankling, and for the rest only a vague sense of loss hung like a cloud over all my faculties.

I had no doubt of the truth of the evil creature's words. Not otherwise could his knowledge and possession of the tattered portrait be accounted for. Now, too, Peggy's unaccountable terror at my discovery of her chaunting and gloating over her work on a certain afternoon, recurred to me and was confirmation irrefragable. The wretched old woman had had all the will and intention; but she was innocent of the deed.

I must look elsewhere, as he had said—begin all over again. True—but now less than ever in my father's direction. Had I needed in my heart convincing proof of the old man's guiltlessness, his manner in accepting his acquittal would have afforded it. By this he had shown that with him, as with the hounds that had sought to pull him down, his guilt was purely conjectural—presumed

merely on the circumstantial evidence of the braces found in his pocket. But I judged him in my heart and pronounced him acquitted.

Now it was idle to moan over my impetuous rush to conclusions. I must only guard against permitting the disillusion to vex the few last days that remained to him. If I wronged the old dead housewife thereby, it was in degree only, for morally she was as guilty as if her charm had borne all the evil force she attributed to it.

Well, I must see about getting some harpy in to minister to her final dumb necessities and then—

A low cry, coming from the other room, broke upon my ears. With beating heart I rushed from the death chamber only—merciful heaven—to enter another!

At the first glance I saw that the white spirit had entered during my absence and had written the sign of eternity on my father's forehead. He was sitting up in bed and the expression on his face was that of a dreadful, eager waiting.

"Renalt!"

He called to me in a clear, loud voice—the recovered note of an old stronger personality.

I hurried to him; fell on my knees; put my arm about his shoulders.

"Renalt, I am dying—but not yet. The spirit won't let me pass till I have spoken."

He turned his head with a resolute effort and gazed upon me.

"What thing have I been—what thing have I been? Send me my enemies that I may face and defy them! Which of them worse than myself? Oh, craven—craven!"

"Father! I only am with you—no enemy, father!"

He struck his fist down upon the counterpane.

"By your love for me you shall know the truth! Judge me then—judge me then as you will. Hear me speak and make no answer till I have finished. Judge me then, and let me pass to my doom weighted with your judgment."

"Father!"

"Renalt, I killed your mother!"

I fell back appalled. An instant—then I leaned forward and again held him in my arms.

"Ah!" his voice broke, swerved and recovered itself. "Not with this hand—my God, no—but surely and pitilessly none the less. Not a month after Modred was born I found my name and trust dishonored and by her. Listen! Speak nothing. You must know all! She had been in service in London before I married her—where, to this day I have never learned. I shall know soon—I shall know. She was friendless—a weak, irresponsible, beautiful young woman. I threw aside all for her sake, and my love grew tenfold in the act of combating the misfortune it brought me. I could love, Renalt—I could love. There was a passion in my fervor."

He clasped his hands wildly and looked piercingly before him.

"How the old torment flames up in me at the last! I think I gave my soul to the wanton and I thought I had hers in exchange. What inspired fools love makes of us! My castle in Cloudland stood firm till that month after Modred's birth. Then all in a day—a minute—it dissolved and vanished. I came upon her secretly gloating over a portrait—the miniature of a man. I saw—suspected—wrenched half the truth from her. Half the truth only, Renalt. When I wedded with her she had a child living. She whose love I had looked upon as a precious possession was all base and hollow, behind her beautiful personality. More—she had borne me three children; yet what affection she was capable of clung about the memory of her first passion. True, this spark had wearied of her, had dismissed her from his service—his service, you understand? And from the face of her child. Yet the long years of my passionate devotion weighed as nothing in the balance. I was the means ready to make of her an honest woman—that was all. An honest woman—my God!"

His teeth snapped together with a click; his dying eyes shone out, but their inspiration was demoniacal.

"In one thing only," he went on in a low hard voice,

"the poor frail wretch was stable. That portrait—the miniature—she died refusing to reveal to me its identity. No threats, no cruelty availed. She kept her secret to the last."

As he now continued his left hand clutched and tightened upon the bedclothes and a dark shadow seemed to grow out of his face.

"I shut her close in the room below. There, with only the voice of the wheel for company, I swore she should remain till she confessed. Each day I brought her food and water, and each day I said, 'Give me his name,' but she was always silent. She had been weak and ailing from caring for her baby Modred, and she faded before my eyes. Yet I was merciless. A little more, I thought, and so worthless, fragile a thing must needs yield and answer me. It was will against will, and hers conquered."

He paused a moment, and I could see drops of sweat freckling his forehead.

"Slowly, hour by hour, the stealth and darkness of her prison wrought madness in her. Still I persisted and she refused. Once she asked to see her children—the little baby I was rearing as best I might, with infinite toil and difficulty—and I laughed and shut her in again. The next morning, going to her, I was dumfounded to hear no booming voice greeting me from the basement. The wheel had stopped. I threw back the door and she was gone. But the cupboard was sprung open and the damned water spurted and leaped from the motionless blades. A stump of timber was lying near. She had burst the lock with it, and—I rushed and dropped the sluice; hurried back and looked down. I saw her dress tangled in the floats below, and the water heaping into a little mound as it ran over something. Then I raced to the room over above, wrenched up a board, and, fastening a rope to a beam, lowered the slack of it into the pit. It served me well in after days, as you know.

"I can hardly remember how I got her out. I know all my efforts were futile, till I thought of notching a paddle and fixing the rope in the hole. When at last I laid

her down on the floor of the room I grew sick with horror. There was that in her staring eyes that made my soul die within me.

"I threw the place open to the authorities. I courted every inquiry. She had been in a delirious state, I said, since the coming of the child, and had thrown herself down in a fit of madness. Only the evidence of the burst lock I suppressed.

"We had been reserved folk, making few friends or none. Our manner of life was known only to ourselves; not a soul suspected the truth and many pitied me in my bereavement. I kept my own counsel. They brought in a verdict of suicide during temporary insanity, and she lies under an old nameless mound in the cemetery yonder.

"Then I shut my heart and my door and made out life in the blackness.

"At first I was whelmed in the horror of the catastrophe, yet my pity was not touched and I soon came to believe in the justice of her fate. 'I never put hand on her,' I thought. 'Twas God wrought the punishment.' But soon a terrible hatred woke in my heart for the first author of my misery. One day I descended by the wheel again and nailed the miniature to its axle. 'Wait you there!' I cried, 'till the question is answered. So shall he follow in her footsteps.' Ah, I have heard talk of the fateful fascination of the wheel! Why has it never drawn him to come and claim his portrait?"

The fevered torrent of speech broke suddenly in him, and silence reigned in the room. The dying heart leaped against my chest as I held him, and my own seemed to flutter with the contact. What could I think or say? I was dazed with the passion of my emotions.

Presently he turned himself quickly and looked at me.

"Your judgment!" he cried, hoarsely. "Did I well or wickedly?"

Through my mind there swiftly passed memory of the barren neglect of our younger lives; of all the evil and misery that had been the indirect result of so cowardly a nursing of an injury.

I bowed my head, and said in a low voice: "I forgive you. That is all you must ask of me."

Perhaps, in the light of his later gentleness, he understood me, for suddenly the tears were running down his cheeks and he cried falteringly: "Out of the abyss of death a ghost rises and faces me! All this have I done for the son I love!"

With the words he fell back from my arm and lay gasping on his pillow. And, though my father was near spent, and I knew it, I could find in my heart no word of justification of his conduct, no comfort but the assurance of my forgiveness.

Oh, it is an evil thing to arrogate to ourselves God's prerogative of judgment; to assume that in any personal wrong we can so disassociate justice and resentment as ever to be capable of pronouncing an impartial sentence. To return a blow in kind is a natural and wholesome impulse; but deliberate cruelty, following however great a provocation, can never be anything but most base and unmanly.

And the sin had been sinned before she even knew my father! Yet, maybe, to a nature like his, that was the reverse of a palliation. To feel that he had never had her true love or duty, while lavishing his all of both on her; to feel that in a manner the veins of his own children ran with contamination—I could conceive these operating more fiercely in his mind than the discovery that some later caprice of fancy had lured her from her faith.

It was all past and over and I would not condemn or even judge him. Though I had been one victim of his quarrel with life, what was my grievance in face of the awful prospect so immediately before him? In a few hours—moments, maybe—the call would come and his soul would have to submit itself for analysis in the theater of the skies.

CHAPTER LVI.

ALONE.

About 4 of the afternoon my father, who had lain for some hours in a state bordering on stupor, and whose breathing had latterly become harsh and difficult, rose suddenly in his bed and called to me in a strong voice. I was by his side in a moment and lifted him up as he signified I should do. A mortal whiteness was in his face and I saw the end was approaching.

"I have no fear," he said, in a sort of sick ecstasy. "I can be true to myself at the last, thank God! The soul triumphs over the body."

He swayed in my arms, clutched at me and dragged himself erect again.

"My brain—my brain! Something seems to swerve in it! Quick! Before it's too late!"

He held on to me. At the last moment the latent determination of his character trod weakness under and proved the soul masterful. With all his functions withering in the blighting breath of the destroyer, his spirit stood out fearless and courageous, a conqueror by its mere individuality.

It had darkened early, and candles were lighted in the room and the blind pulled down. Outside the wind tore at the crazy lattice, or, finding entrance, moaned to and fro in the gusty passages. It threatened to be a night of storm and sweeping rain. And all its wild and dismal surroundings were in keeping with the ghastly figure lying against me. Yet, if there was one in that lonely chamber who shrunk and feared, it was I, not that other so verging on his judgment, with so many and such heavy responsibilities to answer for. God forgive him!

"I triumph, Renalt," he said, feeding the effort of speech with quick, drawn gasps. "This later craven has never

been I—I was strong to carry out a purpose, even if it led me to the gallows. Some white-livered devil usurped. Out with the worm at last! I triumph and abide by that I did in the righteousness of wrath. But you—you! Let me say it—quick—I was fast on the coward grip. Oh, a bitter, bitter curse on the treacherous beast who unmanned me! Only to you, Renalt, I pray and ask for pardon. I thought—all the time—I had killed the boy—the braces—I never knew. He—he, that reptile, suggested—perhaps Modred had—found and kept the cameo. I went up blindly—came down blindly—I was drunk—bestial—I could remember nothing.”

He moaned and would have clasped his hands to me but for weakness. At the last the paralysis of his limbs had departed and he could move. Disease loosened its clutch, it seemed, in the presence of the death it had invoked.

“Renalt—I remembered nothing—but I feared—and, fearing, I saw the odium rest on you and did not speak. It was I gave you to that living death—I who submitted to that fiend’s dictating, because he struck at me through the sordid passion that had mastered my better nature. Renalt——”

“Father—hear me! Am I speaking distinctly? Listen. I forgive you all.”

It seemed as if a flush passed across his face. He pressed my hand feebly and dropped his head.

“Now,” he muttered; “come the crash of doom! To all else I am ready to answer. Call the——”

Like a glass breaking, his voice snapped and immediate silence befell. He had not stirred in my arms; but now I felt the whole surface of his body moving, as it were, of itself with a light ruffling shudder.

Suddenly he seemed to shrink into himself, rather than away from me, so that he cowered unsupported on the bed. I fell back and looked at his face. His head moved softly from side to side, the eyes following something, unseen of me, hither and thither about the room. In a moment they contracted and fixed themselves horribly on one point, as if the things had come to the bed foot

and were softly mounting it. In the same instant on my dull and appalled senses broke the low booming voice of the wheel circling in its black pit far below, and I knew that in the phantom sound no material force spoke, but that the heart of the dying man was transmitting its terrors to me.

Then I saw my father sink slowly back, drawing, as he did so, the sheet up and over his face, as if to shut out the sight, and all the time the convulsive fluttering of my own breath alone stirred the tense silence that reigned about us.

I must have remained in this position many minutes, fixed and motionless in a trance of fear, when the stealthy noise below seemed to cease suddenly as it had begun. At that I leaped to my feet with a strangled cry and tore the bedclothes away from the face. The eyes stared up at me as if I were the secret presence; the jaw was dropped; the whole body collapsed and sunk into the sheets. He had died without a sound—there—in a moment; had died of that that was beyond human speech; of something to which no dreadful human cry could give expression.

* * * * *

Wading near knee deep in the flooded meadows, sense and reason returned to me by slow degrees. Then a wan streak of sunrise gaped like a dead man's wound on the stormy horizon, and a new day was breaking to wind and deluge that seemed endless.

Ah, surely I had been tried beyond mortal endurance. So I thought, not knowing what was yet to come; what tension the soul's fetters can be put to without breaking.

The sodden day broadened and found me still wandering. Once during the morning I crept back to the house of terror, and, standing without its door, summoned the old woman, who had come of herself to attend to dead Peggy's laying out, and told her of my father's death and directed her to a second task.

Later in the day, I told myself, I would return; by and by when the dead should be decently composed for rest and their expression should have resumed something of

its normal cast. Then I hurried forth again and sought forgetfulness in the keen rush of air and wide reality of the open country.

Walking, resting on some gate or stile; seeking a way-side tavern for food and drink—always I kept steadily away from me the slightest reflection on any of the last words spoken by my father. I could not bear that my thoughts should so much as approach them. I had greatly suffered, been greatly wronged, yet let my mind dwell insistently on the thought that these evils were of the past, never more to vex me out of reason should I look steadily forward, shutting my ears, like the prince in the fairy tale, to the spectral voices that would fain provoke me to an answer.

It was growing near that dusky period of the short day when if one lifts one's eyes from the ground the sky seems closing in upon the earth! Worn out and footsore, I had rounded toward the city from its eastern side and was traversing the now lonely stretch of by-path that leads from the station, when I saw a woman and little child going on in front of me haltingly. As I came up they drew aside to let me pass, and I cried out, "Zyp!" and stopped in astonishment and a little fear.

She faced round upon me, breathing quickly, and put one hand to her bosom in a startled manner that was quite foreign to her.

"Renny," she whispered, with a fading smile on her white face—pitiful heaven, how white and worn it had become! And burst into tears the next moment.

Shocked beyond measure at her appearance, her woe-ful reception of me, I stepped back all amazed. She mistook my action and held out an imploring arm to me. The little weird girl at her side half buried herself in her mother's skirts and peered up at me with deep eyes set in a tangle of hair.

"Renny!" cried Zyp; "oh, you won't throw me off? You won't refuse to hear me?"

"Come away," I said, hoarsely; "to some quiet road, where we can talk undisturbed. You are not too tired?"

"Too—oh, I'm wearied to death. Why not the mill? Renny, why not the mill?"

"Zyp, not now—not at present. I'll tell you by and by. See, I'll take the little girl on one arm and you can cling to the other."

She pushed the child forward with a forlorn sigh. It whimpered a little as I lifted it, but I held it snug against my shoulder, and its soft breath on my cheeks seemed to melt the hard core of agony in my brain.

Soon I had them in a quiet spot and seated upon a fallen log. There, holding the child against me, I looked in the eyes of the mother and could have wept.

"Zyp, Zyp! What is it?"

A boisterous clap of wind tumbled her dark hair as I spoke. What was it? Her lustrous head was strewn with ashy threads, as if the clipping fate had trimmed some broken skein of life over it; her eyes were like fathomless pools shrunk with drought; an impenetrable sorrow was figured in her wasted face. This was the shadow of Zyp—not the sweet substance—and moving among ghosts and shadows my own life seemed stumbling toward the grave.

CHAPTER LVII.

A PROMISE.

Clasping thin, nervous fingers, Zyp looked up in my face fearfully.

"Have you seen Jason?"

"No. Has he come, too?"

"He's gone on before to the mill to seek you."

"God help him! I've been out all day. Is it the old trouble, Zyp?"

"Oh, Renny, I despair at last! I fought it while I was strong; but now—now."

Her head sunk and she pressed a hand to her bosom again.

"What ails you, dear? Zyp, are you ill?"

"I don't know. Something seems to suck at my veins. I have nothing definite. The wretchedness of life is sapping my strength, I suppose."

"Is it still so wretched? I am always here to give you what help I can."

"Oh, I know! And we must always be cursing your quiet with our entreaties."

"Zyp, you needn't talk like that. My heart is open to my little sister. And is this my bonny niece?"

She was a slender mite of four or thereabouts, with a delicate thin face, oval like a blushing rose petal, and a quaint, solemn manner of movement and broken speech.

"Give me a kiss, mouse. Oh, what a prim little peck!"

A faint smile came to the mother's lips. "You'll learn to love your uncle, Renna."

"Did you name her after me?"

"Don't flatter yourself. I call her Renna for short. Her real name's Zyp."

I laughed over the queer deduction; then sighed.

"Will you love me?" I said to the little girl, but she was too shy to answer.

I stroked her shining head and poke over it to Zyp.

"Tell me all about it, dear," said I.

"It's nothing, but the old miserable story—pursuit and flight; and with each new movement some little means of living abandoned."

Looking at this pale, injured woman, a fierce deep resentment flared up in my heart against the inexorable tyranny of the fiend who would not learn mercy. I had too long stood aside; too long remained neutral in an unnatural warfare, the most innocent victim of which was she whose image my soul professed to hold inviolate. Old ties bound me no longer. Her champion would I be in life and death, meeting stealth with secrecy, pursuit with ambush.

I put the child from me and rose hurriedly to my feet.

"Zyp!" I cried, "this must end! Forgive me that, holding you in my heart as I have always done, I have not

been more active in your succor. Here all doubt ends. I devote myself body and soul to your help and welfare!"

Crying softly, she drew her little one to her and wound her arms about her. Now the last of her weird nature seemed broken and gone, and she was woman only, helpless and alone.

"Renny, Renny," she sobbed, "why didn't you sooner? Oh, Renny! Why didn't you sooner?"

Her anguish—her implied reproach—pierced to my soul.

"Has that been in your mind, Zyp? I never thought—it was always a habit with me to yield the lead to Jason, and you were so strong and independent."

"Not now for long—a haunted, hunted thing! But I had no right—and then, your father."

"If I thought I had sacrificed your interests to a mistaken sense of duty to him—ah, Zyp, it would be a very bitter thing."

"No, no! You've always been strong and good and generous. Don't mind what I say. I'm only desperate with trouble. Hush, little rabbit! Mother cries with joy to have found a friend."

"Need you have sought long? Every word you say seems a reproach."

"No, no, no; you'll misread me and fall away from us at the last."

"I swear not! Tell me what has happened."

"We thought we had escaped him—perhaps that he was dead. There was a long respite; then one night—four, five days ago—he was there. Some place where they gamble with cards—and he accused my husband of cheating. There was a terrible scene. Jason came home all smeared with blood, but it was the old terror that made us despair. Why are such things allowed on earth? It seemed all leaf and flowers and sky to me once. How long ago! He stood outside our lodgings the next morning. His dreadful face was like a devil's. Then we knew we must go. When the bill was paid we had only a few shillings left. In our sickness we turned to you,

and we set off tramping, tramping down to Winton by easy stages. Jason carried the child; my arms were too weak."

"And he—that other?"

"He's sure to follow us, but he won't know we've walked."

I remembered the figure on the bridge four nights ago, and was silent.

"Renalt, what can we do?"

"Jason has gone to me for money, I suppose?"

"Oh, if you could only let us have a little; we might escape abroad again and bury ourselves in some far-away spot, where he could never find us."

"Zyp, listen to me. My father died last night."

"Died? The old man! Oh, Renny, Renny!"

"He had been long ailing. I have been wandering all day to try to restore my shattered nerves. That is why I have not met Jason."

"Dead! The old, poor man! And you are alone?"

"Yes, Zyp."

She broke down and wept long and sadly.

"He was good to me," she moaned, "and I requited his kindness ill. And now I come to worry you in your unhappiness."

"You came to lighten it with a glimpse of the old sweet nature—you and your pretty baby here."

"Do you think her pretty, Renny? He would have been fond of her, and he's gone. What a world of death and misery!"

"Now the mill is no place for you at present. Old Peggy is dead, too, and gone to her judgment. In a few days the house will be quit of mourning. Then you must all three come and live with me there, and we'll make out life in company."

She sat clasping her little girl and staring at me, her lips parted, as she listened breathlessly.

"That would be good," she whispered. "Do you hear, baby? Mumby and Renna will lie down at last and go to sleep."

The child pressed her cheek to her mother's and put

her short arms about her neck with a sympathetic sigh. Her lot, I think, had been no base contrast with that of children better circumstanced. She was dressed even now as if from the fairy queen's wardrobe, though Zyp's poor clothes were stained and patched in a dozen places.

Then my love—oh, may I not call her so now?—looked up at me sorrowfully over the brink of her short ecstasy.

"Dear Renny," she said, "how can it ever be as you say? Rest can never come to us while he lives."

"I have sworn, Zyp. I am confident and strong to grapple with this tragic Furioso. If he persists after one more warning we'll set the law on him for a wandering lunatic."

"That I believe he is—oh!" she closed her eyes as if in an ineffable dream of peace and security.

"The question is, what are you to do in the meantime?"

"That's soon settled. We came over Micheldever, only a few miles away. We'll go back there and hire a single room in the village—I saw one to let that would suit us—and wait till you send for us."

"Very well. And what do you say to taking little Zyp back by yourself and leaving Jason here under my wing?"

"If you think it best."

"I must make certain arrangements with him. Yes, I think that will be best." I spoke cheerfully and buoyantly, anxious to quicken and sustain her new-born hope. Uneasy forebodings, nevertheless, drove me to make the proposition. I could not free my mind of the thought that Duke yet hung secretly about the place, induced to wait and watch on that sure instinct that had never yet in the long run failed to interpret to him the movements of his victims.

Therefore I felt it safer to keep my brother for the present under friendly lock and key rather than risk a further exposing of him to the malignant observation of his enemy.

"Zyp, take this money. I wish it were more, but it will keep you going for the present."

"No, Renny, I have a little left."

"Don't worry me, changeling."

"Ah, the name and the flowers." She rose to her feet. "Have you forgotten my asking you never to pick one?"

"Not once in my life since, Zyp. My conscience is free of that reproach."

She looked at me with a sweet strange expression in her wet eyes.

"Good-by, dear brother," she said, suddenly, holding out her hand to me.

"Shall I not see you off?"

"No. We shan't have long to wait, I dare say, and Jason will be wishing for you. Kiss—Renny, kiss dad for me—this kiss"—and she stepped hurriedly forward and put her soft trembling lips to my forehead.

My blood leaped. For a moment I was near catching her madly in my arms.

"Good-by!" I cried, swerving back. "Good-by, little Zyp!"

They moved from me a few paces. Out in the road the wind caught the woman's skirts and flung her dark hair abroad. Suddenly she turned and came back to me.

"Renny," she said, in low, heartrending tones, "it looks so happy and golden, but the fierce air talked in my lungs as I went. Oh, promise—promise—promise!"

"Anything, Zyp, in the wide world."

"To care for my little one—my darling, if I'm called away."

"Before God I swear to devote my life to her."

She looked at me a long moment, with a piercing gaze, gave a hoarse, low sob, and catching at her child's hand hurried away with her down the road. I watched their going till their shapes grew dim in the stormy dusk; then twisted about and strode my own way homeward.

Heaven help me! It was my last vision of her who, through all the hounding of fate, had made my life "a perfumed altar-flame."

Before I reached the mill the rain swept down once more, wrapping the gabled city in high spectral gloom.

Not dust to dust, it seemed, was our lot to be in common with the sons of men, but rather the fearfuller ruin of those whose names are "writ in water."

So fiercely drove the onset of flying deluge that scarcely might I force headway against its icy battalions. Dark was falling when at last I reached the mill, and all conflicting emotions I might have felt on approaching it were numbed by reason of the mere physical effort of pressing forward. Therefore it was that hastening down the yard, my eyes were blind to neighboring impressions, otherwise some unaccustomed shape crouching in the shelter of its blackness would have induced me to a pause.

As it was, I fell, rather than beat, against the door, and then drew myself back to gather breath. Almost immediately a step sounded coming down the passage beyond, the door was pulled inward, and I saw the figure of Jason standing in the opening.

"Ah!" I gasped, and was about to step in, when he gave a sickly screech and his hands went up, as if in terror to ward off a blow.

I felt a breath at my ear and turned quickly round—and there was the white face of Duke almost looking over my shoulder!

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE "SPECTER HOUND."

That night when the flood waters rose to a head was a terrible one for Winton—one ghastly in the extreme for all lost souls whose black destinies guided their footsteps to the mill.

Perhaps a terror of being trapped—to what hideous fate, who knows?—somewhere in the tortuous darkness of the building, sent my brother leaping by a mad impulse into the waste uproar of the night. Anyhow, before my confused senses could fully grasp the dread nature of the situation, he had rushed past me, plunged into and up the yard, and was racing for his life.

As he sprang by, the cripple made a frantic clutch at him, nipped the flying skirt of his coat, staggered and rolled over, actually with a fragment of torn cloth in his hand. He was up on his feet directly, however, and off in pursuit, though I in my turn vainly grasped at him as he fled by.

Then reason returned to me and I followed.

It all happened in a moment, and there were we three hotly engaged in such a tragic game of follow-my-leader as surely had never before been played in the old city. And there was no fear of comment or interference. We had the streets, the wind and rain, the night to ourselves, and, before our eyes, if these failed us, the wastes of eternity.

Racing in the tracks of the cripple, as he followed in Jason's, I managed to keep measured pace with him, and that was all. How he made such time over the ground with his crooked limbs was matter for marvel, yet, I think, in that mad brief burst I never lessened the distance between us by a yard. It was a comparative test of the fearful, the revengeful and the apprehensive impulses, and sorely I dreaded in the whirling scurry of the chase that the second would win.

Across the yard—to the left over the short stone bridge, under whose arch the choked mill-tail tumbled and snarled—a little further and up Chis'll street, with a sharp swerve to the right, the hunted man rushed with Duke at his heels. Then a hundred yards on, in one lightning-like moment, Jason, giving out in a breathless impulse of despair, as it seemed, threw himself against the shadowy buttress of a wall, crouching with his back to the angle of it; Duke, checking his flying footsteps some paces short of his victim, came to a sudden stop; and I, carried forward by my own impetus, almost fell against the cripple, and, staggering, seized him by the arms from behind, and so held him fiercely, my lungs pumping like piston rods. Suddenly I marveled to find my captive offering no resistance.

Seeking for the reason of this collapse, I raised my eyes and wondered: "Can this account for it?"

We stood outside Dr. Crackenthorpe's house. Light came through a lower window, immediately opposite us, and set in the luminous square, like an ugly shadow on a wall, was the profile and upper half of the body of the doctor himself. He seemed to be bending over some task and the outline of his face was clearly defined.

Suddenly the clothed flesh of the arms I grasped seemed to flicker, as it were, with shuddering convulsion, and from the lips of the man held against me the breath came sibilant like the breath of one caught in a horror of nightmare.

Before I could think how to act the figure of the doctor rose erect, and I saw him fix his hat on his head. Evidently he was preparing to leave the house.

I felt myself drawn irresistibly to one side. Helpless as a child, I stumbled in the wake of the cripple, tripping over his heels at every step. He hardly seemed to notice the drag set upon him, but stole into a patch of deep shadow, without the dim wedge of light cast through the window, and I had to go, too, if I would keep my hold on him.

Crouching there, with what secret terror on one side and marvel on the other it is impossible to describe, we saw the dark street and the driving rain traversed by a shaft of light as the hall door was pulled open, and become blackness again with its closing. Then, descending the shallow flight of steps, his head bent to the storm, and one hand raised to his hat, the doctor came into view and the whole body of the cripple seemed to shoot rigid with sudden tension.

This fourth actor on the scene, turning away from us, walked, unconscious of Jason hidden in the shadow as he passed him, up the street, his hand still to his head, his long skirts driven in front of him by the wind, so that he looked as if his destiny were pulling him reluctant forward by all-embracing leading strings.

As he went up the slope and vanished in the darkness, a groan as if of pent-up agony issued from Duke, and immediately he drew me from the shadow and round to the foot of the steps.

A chink of light that divided the blackness above us, showed that the door had not been closed to. Probably the doctor had gone forth on some brief errand only, and would return in a moment.

Suddenly I became conscious that Duke was mounting the steps—that some strange spirit, in which his first mission of hate was absorbed, was moving him to enter the house.

“Where are you going?” I cried, struggling with him. He gave no answer; took not the least notice of me. What response could I expect from a madman like this? Staring before him—panting like one at the end of a race—he slowly ascended, dragging me with him. Then on the turn of a thought, I quitted my hold of him and he staggered forward. The next instant he had recovered himself, had pushed open the door and was in the hall.

I hurried to where Jason yet stood motionless, his face white as a patch of plaster set against the darkness of the wall.

“Keep off!” he cried, in a wavering voice.

“You fool! It’s I! Didn’t you see him go into that house? Some insane fancy had drawn his off the scent. Run back to the mill—do you hear? I won’t leave him—he shan’t follow.”

He came from his corner and clutched me with shaking hands.

“Where’s there money? It’s all useless without that, I tell you. Give it to me or I’ll kill you. I’ve as much right to it as you. My God! Why didn’t you tell me the old man was dead? It was devilish to let me go in on him like that. Tell me where to find money and I’ll take it and be off!”

“Listen to me. If he comes out again while you talk I won’t answer for the result. We’ll discuss money matters by and by. Go now—back to the mill, do you understand? And wait till I come!”

He was about to retort, but some sound, real or fancied, strangled the words in his throat. He leaped from me—glanced fearfully at the light streaming from the open door—crossed the street, his body bent double,

and, keeping this posture, hurried with a rapid shuffling motion back in the direction of the mill.

Standing with one foot on the lowest step leading up to the house, I watched till he was out of sight, then turned and looked into the dimly lighted hall. What should I do? How act with the surest safety and promptitude in so immediate a crisis? I could not guess what unspeakable attraction had so strangely drawn the hunter from his trembling quarry at the supreme moment; only I saw that he had vanished and that the hall was empty of him.

A quick, odd sound coming from the interior of the house decided me. I sprung up the steps and softly entered the hall. The door leading to the doctor's private room, where the murderous busts grinned down, stood open; and from here issued the noise, that was like the bestial sputtering growl of some tigerish thing mauling and mangling its prey.

I stepped hastily over the threshold and stopped with a jerk of terror.

Something was there, in the dully lighted room—down on the rug before the fire. Something had rolled and raved and tore at the material beneath it—an animal's skin, judged by the whisks of ragged hair that stuck in the creature's claws and between his teeth that had rent them out—something—Duke, who foamed and raged as he lay sprawled on his hands and knees and snarled like a wild beast in his frenzy of insanity.

"He's mad—mad!" I whispered to myself in an awful voice; and yet he heard me and paused in the height of his fury, and looked round and up at me standing white-lipped by the door.

Then suddenly, while I was striving, amid the wild heat of my brain, to identify some hooded memory that raised its head in darkness, the maniac sprung to his feet, gripped me by the wrist and pointed down at the huddled heap beneath him.

"Look!" he shrieked, the firelight dancing in his glittering eyes. "Look! we've met at last! The dog that scared and tortured the wretched sick boy—the dog, the

devil! Into the fire with him to blaze and writhe and scream as a devil should!"

He plunged again, snarling; and, before I could gather sense to stop him, had seized and flung the whole mass upon the burning coals. Flames shot out and around, and the room in a moment was sick with the stench of flaring pelt. I rushed to tear the heap away; but he met and struggled with me like a fiend inspired, and helpless I saw the flames lick higher.

Straining against me, he laughed and yelled: "He wants water! He shrieks to Abraham—but not a drop—not one! Look at his red tongue, shooting out in agony! They fall before me—at last, at last! My time has come!"

His voice rose to a scream—there was a responsive shout from the door. I slewed my head round and saw the white face of the servant girl peering through the opening behind the figure of Dr. Crackenthorpe standing there in black, blank amazement.

"Help!" I cried; "he's mad!"

With a deep oath the doctor strode forward, and Duke saw him. In an instant, with a cry of different tone—a shriek of terror—he spun me from him, sprung past the other, drove the girl screaming into the passage, and was gone.

"Stop! By all——"

The doctor's exclamation was for me. I had staggered back, but an immediate fear drove me, with no time for explanation, to hurried pursuit.

"Out of the way!" I cried, violently; "he mustn't escape!"

He would have barred my passage. I came against him with a shock that sent him reeling. As his hands clutched vainly in the air I rushed from the room and from the house.

With my first plunge into the street a weltering stream of fire ran across the sky, and in a moment an explosive crash shook the city like the bursting open of the gates of torment.

Amid flood and storm and the numbing slam of thunder the tragedy of the night was drawing to its close.

CHAPTER LIX.

INTO THE DEPTHS.

Momentarily I saw—a black mote in that flickering violet transparency—the figure of Duke as he ran before me bobbing up and down like the shadow of the invisible man. Drawn by a sure instinct, he was heading for the mill, and every nerve must I strain to overtake him, now goaded by fear and triumph to maniacal frenzy.

But half the distance was covered when the rain swept down in one blinding sheet, that lashed the gutters into froth a foot high and numbed the soul with its terrific uproar.

On I staggered, knowing only for my comfort that the pursued must needs labor against no less resistance than the pursuer. Inch by inch I fought my way, taking advantage of every buttress and coign of shelter that presented itself; leaping aside with thump-heart from the crash of falling tiles or dropping swing of branches, as the wind flung them right and left in its passing; now stumbling and regaining my feet, shoulder to the storm, now driven back a pace by some gust—a giant among its fellows—inch by inch I drove on till the mill yard was reached; and all the way I gained never a foot upon him I strove to run down.

Then, rushing along the yard, where comparative shelter was, I found a thrill of fear, in the midmost confusion of my thoughts, for the safety of the building itself. For the voice of the mill-tail smote the roar of the elements and seemed to silence it, and the foam of its fury sprung and danced above the high-walled channel and flung itself against the parapet of the bridge in gusts of frosty whiteness. And in the little lulls came the whistle of sliding tiles from the roof or snap of them breaking from the walls; so that it seemed before long nothing

but a skeleton of ancient timbers like the ribs and spars of the phantom death-ship would stand for the blast to scream through.

Then I came panting to the mill, my soul so whelmed in the roar of all things that room scarcely was for thought of those two stark sleepers lying quiet above and deaf forevermore to the hateful tumults of life—came to the mill, and on the instant abandoned hope. For so it appeared that in rushing from the door none had thought to shut it, and the tempest had caught and, near battering it from its hinges, had dashed it, wrenched and splintered, against the wall of the passage beyond, and in such way that no immediate human power might close it. And there lay the way into the building; open to all who listed, and if Jason had run thither, as I bade him——

These thoughts were in passing. I never stayed my progress for them, but without pause leaped into the inclosed darkness, and only then I stood still.

Instantly with my plunge into that pit of blackness the hosts of the storm without seemed to break and scatter before the wind, shaken with low spasms of thunder as they fled; but under my feet the racing waters took up great chords of sound, so that the whole building trembled and vibrated with their awful music.

Overstrung to a pitch of madness, I felt my way to the foot of the stairs, and, stumbling, mounted in the darkness, and reached the first landing.

All was still as death. Perhaps it was death come in a new shape, and stealthily lying somewhere to trip up my feet in a ghastly game of clowns. I dared not go further; dared hardly to breathe.

As I stood, a rat began gnawing at the skirting. The jar of his teeth was like the turning of a rusty lock. The old superstition about falling houses passed through my mind. What if the close night about me were to be suddenly rent with the explosive splintering of great beams—with the raining thunder of roof and chimney-stack pouring downward in one vast ruin, of which I should be the mangled palpitating core?

My body burst into a cold sweat. Perhaps above all

the fear in me was that death should find me with my mission unaccomplished; that I should have striven and waited in vain.

Shrinking, I would not push further to the upper rooms, but felt my way down the stairs once more. It was, at least, hardly probable that Jason would have rushed for asylum to the very death chambers above. More likely was I to find him crouching unnerved, if still alive, in some dark corner of one of the lower rooms.

As I descended into the passage I fancied I heard a step coming toward me; and the next moment a dusky shape stood up between me and the dim oblong of lesser darkness that marked where the front door gaped open. I ran forward—grasped at it blindly; and long arms were crooked about me and held me as in a vise.

"Who's here?" cried Dr. Crackenthorpe, in a mad voice. "Who is it? Say, Renalt Trender, and let me choke the cursed life out of him!"

His passion would hardly allow him to articulate. He dragged me unresisting to the door, up the yard, and thrust his ugly face down till it almost touched mine.

"It is!" he cried, with a scream of fury. "Look—look there! See what you've done!"

I had marked it already—a dull glow rising over the houses and chimney pots that lay between us and Chis'll street—a glow writhed with twisted skeins of smoke, that rolled heavily upward, coiling sluggishly in the calm that had fallen.

"Look!" he screeched; "the priceless treasures of a life—the glories I bartered my soul for—doomed, in a moment, and by your act! Oh, dog, for revenge!"

"You lie!" I cried, outshrieking his rage with a fury that half-shook him from his hold on me. "I had no part in it! You saw it and you know! Go! Attend to your own. I've deadlier work in hand."

I tore myself free of him with a violence that brought him on his knees, and hurried up the yard once more and into the pitchy house. He came upon me again while I was fumbling in my pockets for a match, but he put out no hand to me a second time.

"Listen, you," he said, and the words rose and burst from his throat like bubbles. "You have been a thorn in my foot ever since I trod this city. If yours wasn't the act, you were the cause. I would have killed you both on the spot—you and your accomplice—if the fire, blazing out on the curtains, had left me time. Now you shall know what it is to have made me desperate—desperate, do you understand, you fulsome cur? Better take a viper to bed with you than the thought of my revenge."

"Dr. Crackenthorpe," I said, very coolly, "you are a ruffian and a blackguard. Which is the more desperate of us two is an open question. Anyhow, I fancy myself the stronger. There's the door. If you remain this side of it after I have counted twelve you try conclusions with the mill-tail yonder."

I had struck a match while I spoke and kindled an oil lamp standing on a bracket. This wrestle with an evil soul had braced my nerves like a tonic.

He slapped back against the passage wall, staring at me and gasping. His face, I saw, was grimed with smoke, and his coat scorched in places.

I began to count, looking into his eyes, with a grim smile—had got as far as nine, without awakening movement on his part, when a deathly yell rung through the house and the words died on my lips.

I felt the blood leave my face, sinking like water in snow. There was no mistaking the direction from which the sound had come. It issued from the haunted room—there from the black end of the passage—from the core of hideous night, whose silence no storm could penetrate.

Once I looked at the face before me and saw my own terror reflected in it; then I sprung for the dreadful place, sick, at whatever cost, to solve the mystery of the cry.

Groping for the heavy timbered door, I came suddenly upon a wide luminous square and almost fell into it. Then I saw, indeed, that the door itself was open and that a dim glow lighted the interior of the room. Something else I saw in the same instant—Duke, standing at

the open mouth of the cupboard that inclosed the wheel—Duke, with a fearful smile on his white face, and his head bent as if he listened. And his black glowing eyes, set in pools of shadow, alone moved, fixing their gaze steadily on mine as I came into their vision.

"Stop!" he said, in a clear, low voice. He need not have bidden me. My limbs seemed paralyzed—my heart stiffening with deadly foreboding of some approaching wickedness.

A lighted lantern stood near him on the floor and threw a gigantic distorted shadow of him on the wall against the window.

"Did you hear?" he said, in a whisper that thrilled to me where I stood. "Is it haunted, this room of yours? It seems so. Listen!"

He leaned over and looked down into the pit, so that the upper half of his body was plunged in black shadow. Simultaneously an appalling scream rose from the depths and echoed away among the rafters above.

The marrow froze in my bones. I struggled vainly to rush forward, but my feet would not obey my will.

"My God!" I muttered from a crackled throat—"my God!"

He was looking at me again across the glowing space, a grin twitching up his mouth like a dog's.

"If you move to come at me," he said, "I leap down there and end it. He won't thank you, though."

"Duke," I forced myself to mutter, at length, in uncontrollable horror. "Is it Jason? Oh! be satisfied at last and God will forgive you."

"Why, so I am!" he cried, with a whispering laugh. "But I never sent him down there. He went of his own accord—a secret, snug hiding-place. But he should have waited longer; and who would have thought of looking so deep! It was his leaning over, as he came up, to put the lantern where it stands that drew me."

In the sickness of my terror I saw it all. Jason, flying back to the mill, mad with fear, mad for the means of escape—Jason, who had already solved the mystery of the treasure, and had only hitherto lacked the courage

necessary to a descent upon it—Jason, in his despair, had seized a light, burst into the room of silence; had found the wheel stopped and the key in the lock, as I had left them; had, summoning his last of manliness, gone down into the pit and, returning, had met his fearful enemy face to face.

I read it all and, utterly hopeless and demoralized as I was—knowing that a movement on my part would precipitate the tragedy—yet found voice to break the spell, and delivered my agony in a shriek.

“Jason!” I screamed; “Jason! Climb up! You are as strong as he! Climb up and defy him! We are two to one!”

Even as the volume of my cry seemed to strike a responsive weak echo from the bowels of the pit, I was conscious that Dr. Crackenthorpe was breathing behind me over my shoulder. And while the sound of my voice ran from beam to beam in devilish harmonics, the cripple suddenly threw up his arms with a quavering screech and leaped upon the threshold of the cupboard.

“The man!” he yelled; “the dog, and now the man! I know him at last!”

Dr. Crackenthorpe broke past me with an answering cry:

“He fired my house! Stop him! The hound! Stop him!”

As he sprang forward Duke, with a sudden swoop, seized the lantern from the floor and flung it at him; and at the same instant—as I saw by the flaming arc of light it made—clutched the rope and swung himself into the vault. The lantern crashed and was extinguished. The doctor uttered a fierce oath. Spellbound I stood, and for half a dozen seconds the weltering blackness eddied with a ghastly silence. Then I heard the doctor fling past me, running out of the room with a fearful exclamation on his lips, and, as he went, scream after scream rise from the depths, so that my soul seemed to faint with the agony of it.

Groping, staggering, my brain reeling, I stumbled toward the sound.

"God forgive me!" I whispered. "Death is better than this."

Even with the thought a new uproar broke upon my senses—the thunderous heaving onrush of a mighty torrent of water underfoot.

In a flash I knew what had happened. The hideous creature had lifted the sluice and turned the swollen flood upon the wheel.

Then the past swept over me in a hurried panorama as my poor brain paused for rest.

Who killed Modred—How did he die?

What is the mystery of Duke Straw?

What was the sin of my mother?

Whose portrait was it that my father nailed to the axle of the wheel?

These and many other of the problems haunting my life came to me in swift succession, only to be passed in dullness and left unanswered.

CHAPTER LX.

WHO KILLED MODRED?

In the instant of realization, as I stood near, death-stricken, where I had stopped, I felt the whole room shake and tremble as the torrent leaped upon the wheel with a flinging shock, heard a clanking screech rise from the monster as it turned, slowly at first, but quickly gathering speed under the awful pressure; heard one last bubbling scream waver up from the depths and die within the narrow vault; then all sense was whelmed and numbed in the single booming crash of water.

Already, indeed, the choked water, hurled high by the paddles, was gushing through the opening in cascades upon the floor. How long would the ancient rafters and beams and walls resist the terrible pressure?

I had no thought or desire to escape. What had taken me long to describe, all passed in a few seconds. But Providence, that here included so many actors in the tragedy in one common ruin, had not writ my sentence, and my young suffering soul it spared to this dark world of memories.

Insatiable yet, however, it claimed a last victim.

He came running back now, breathing hateful triumph in the lust of his wickedness—came to gloat over the work of his evil hands.

I heard him splash into the water that poured from the wheel—dance in it—laugh and scream out:

“Tit for tat, and the devil pipes! Caught in his own net! You, there, in the dark! Do you hear? Where are you? Where?—my arms hunger for you!”

The paralysis of my senses left me.

“Man or fiend?” I shrieked above the thunder of the water. “Down on your knees! It is the end for both of us! Down, and weep and pray—for I believe, before God, you have just murdered your son!”

There was a brief fearful pause; he seemed to be listening—then, without preface or warning, there came a sudden surging crash, deafening and appalling and I thought “Is it upon us?”

Still I stood unscathed, though a cracking volley of sounds, rending and shattering, succeeded the crash, and one wild, dreadful cry that pierced through all. Then silence fell, broken only by the smooth, washing sweep of a great body of water through the channel below.

Silence fell and lapped me in a merciful unconsciousness; for, with the relaxing of the mental pressure I went plump down upon the floor where I stood and lay in a long faint.

* * * * *

When I came to myself a dim wash of daylight soaking through the blurred window, had found my face as I lay prone upon the boards, and was crawling up to my eyes like a child to open them. An ineffable soft sense of peace kept still my exhausted limbs in the first waking

moments, and only by degrees occurred to me the horror and tragedy of the previous night.

Still I made no attempt to rise, hoping only in forlorn self-pity that death would come to me gently as I lay and take me by the hand, saying: "With the vexing problems of life you need nevermore trouble yourself."

All around, save for the deep murmur of water, was deathly quiet, and I prayed that it might remain so; that nothing might ever recall me to weariful action again.

Then a faint groan came to my ears and the merciful spell was broken.

Slowly and feebly I gathered myself together to rise. But a second moan dissipated the selfish shadow and stung me to some reluctant action.

Leaning upon my hand I looked about me and could hardly believe the evidence of my senses when I saw the walls and rafters of the fateful room stretching about me unaltered and unscathed. The crash, that had seemed to involve all in one splintering ruin, had left, seemingly, no evidence of its nature whatsoever. Only, for a considerable distance from the mouth of the cupboard, the floor was stained with a sop of water; and, not a dozen feet from me, huddled in the darkest of it, lay a heaped and sodden mass that stirred and sent forth another moan as I looked.

Painfully, then, I got upon my feet and stole, with no sentiment but a weak curiosity, to the prostrate thing. It was as if I had died and my dissatisfied ghost postponed its departure, seeking the last explanation of things. Thus, while my soul was sensitive to the least expression of the tragedy that absorbed it, in the human world outside it seemed no longer to feel an interest.

And here, under my eyes, was tumbled the latest grim victim of this house accursed—the engineer of much diabolical machinery mangled by the demon he had himself evoked. What a pitiful, collapsed ruin, that, for all its resourcefulness, could only moan and suffer!

Only a thin thread of crimson ran from the corner of

his mouth, and where it had made during the night a little pool on the floor under his head it looked like ink.

Near him lay a great jagged block of wood green with slime. I crept to the cupboard opening and looked down.

The wheel was gone!

Then I knew what had happened. The house had triumphed over the stubborn monster that had so long proved its curse. At the supreme moment the vast dam had yielded and saved the building. It had gone, leaving not a trace of wreckage but this—this, and the single torn fragment that had struck down the wretch who set it in motion—had gone, bearing away with it in one boiling ruin the crushed and twisted bodies of the last two victims of its insensate fury.

But one further sign was there of its mighty passing—a ragged rent a foot square driven through the very wall of the house within the vault.

And here a thin shaft of light came in and fell, like the focus of an awful eye, full upon the miniature where it lay nailed, face upward, upon the axle—fell, also, upon that empty niche in the brickwork where once had stood the treasure for which Jason had given his life.

I turned to the shattered man, leaned over him, touched him. He gave a gasp of agony and opened his eyes. The white stare of horror was in them and the blood ran faster from his mouth.

"Water!" he cried, with a dry, clacking sound in his throat.

I hurried from the room, although he called after me feebly not to leave him, drew a jugful from the tap in the kitchen and returned. I heard no sound in the house. A glimmer of flood came in through the gaping door to the yard. No immediate help was possible in the rising of that direful morning after the storm. I was alone with my many dead.

I put the jug to his lips and he sucked down a long, gluttonous draught. Then he looked at me with eager inquiry breaking through his mortal torment.

"My chest is all broken in," he said, straining out his

voice in bitter anguish. "When I move the end will come. Quick!—you said something—at the last moment—what was it?"

"That I believed it was your son you sent to his death down there."

"I have no son. Once—yes—but he died—was poisoned—or drowned."

"Oh! God forgive this man!" I cried, lifting my face in terror, and in that sick moment inspiration, I think, was given me.

"He never died. He was saved, to grow up a hopeless cripple, and that was he you murdered last night."

He closed his eyes again, and I saw his ashen lips moving.

"Oh, man," I cried, "are you praying? Take grace of repentance and humble your wicked soul at the last. I can't believe you innocent of a share in the wretchedness of this wretched house. I am the only one left of it—broken and lost to hope, but I forgive you—do you understand?—I forgive you."

"I never killed the boy," he muttered in a low, suffering tone, and with his eyes still closed.

"Will you tell me all you know about it? If you are guiltless, be merciful as you hope for mercy."

"Modred found the cameo—picked it up—he told me himself—in this very room—where—your father must have dropped it."

I cried "yes" passionately, and implored him to go on.

"He—the old man—that night—accused me of stealing it. It was the first—I'd heard of it. Presently—he fell asleep—in his chair. I thought I would—seize the opportunity to—look for it over the house—quietly. Finding myself—outside—the boy's room—I went in to see—how—he—was getting on. He was awake—and—there was the very thing—in his hand. I asked him how—he had come by it. He told me. I demanded it—of him—said—your father had—promised it me. Nothing—availed—availed."

He was gasping and panting to such a degree that I thought even now he would die, leaving the words I

maddened for unspoken. Brutally, in my torment, I urged him on.

"He—wouldn't give it up. I rushed at him—he put it in his mouth—and—as I seized him, tried to swallow it—and choked. It had stuck at—the entrance to his gullet. In a few moments—in his state he was too—weak to expel it—he was dead. Perhaps—I might have saved him—but the trinket—the beautiful trinket!"

My heart seemed scarcely to beat as I listened. At last I knew the truth—knew it wicked and inhuman; yet—thank God—less atrocious than I had dreaded.

"But afterward," I whispered—"afterward?"

"There was a plan," he moaned, and his speech came with difficulty, "inspired me. I dissuaded—your father—from encouraging—any inquiry. A post-mortem, I knew—would lay open the secret—and lose me—the cameo. He was buried—on my certificate. I got—the man—George White—under my thumb—fed him on fire—lent him money—made him—my tool. One dark—stormy—night—we opened the grave—the coffin. The devil—lent a hand. A new grave—had to be dug—a foot away. It was only—necessary—to—make a horizontal opening—in the intervening soil. I had—my tools—and sliced open the dead boy's throat—and found what I wanted. Only the sexton knew. Nothing—afterward—would persuade—the mad fool—that the boy—hadn't been buried alive—and that—I—hadn't murdered him. Only his fear—of me—kept his mouth—shut. This is—the truth."

He lay quite still, exhausted with his long, cruel effort. I touched him gently with my hand.

"As I hope for rest myself," I said, "I forgive you, now that you have spoken, for all this long, hideous misery. The treasure you staked against your soul is passed in fire and water and lost forever. Nothing remains to you here; and, for the future—oh, pray, man, pray, while there is time!"

My voice broke in a sob. He strove to lift himself, leaning upon his hand, and immediately his mouth was choked with blood.

"Where's he?" he cried, in a stifled voice—"Down there?"

"That way he went. The waters have him now—him, and my brother Jason, who was on the wheel also when you raised the hatch. God knows, their bodies may be miles away by this time."

He looked up at me with an awful expression; then, without another word, dragged himself inch by inch along the floor to the pit mouth and, reaching it, looked down—and immediately a great sputtering cry burst from him:

"Who put that there?—that? the miniature? I gave it to—who did it, I say? It's a trick! My soul burns—it burns already! Tear it off! My own portrait—Minna!"

Thus and in such manner I heard my mother's name spoken for the first time; felt the awful foundering truth burst upon my heart. Uttering it, the soul of this fearful man tore free with a last dying scream of agony, and he dropped upon his face over the threshold of the running vault.

One moment, fate-stricken, I heard in the silence the heavy drip of something going pattering down into the pit—the next, darkness overwhelmed and the world ceased for me.

* * * * *

Did I ever see Zyp again? I know that some one came to me, lying entranced in a long, sick dream, who bore her resemblance, at least, and who spoke gentle words to me and put cold, sweet drink to my lips. But, when I woke at last, she was not there—only a kind, soft woman, a ministering nurse, who moved without noise, and foresaw all my fretful wants.

If she came, she went and left no trace; and I know in my heart I am never to see her more.

And here, month by month, I sit alone in the old haunted, crazy place—alone with my memories and my ghosts and my ancient fruitless regrets.

Dolly and my father—the doctor, and those other two, found far away, welded in a dead embrace, and crushed

and dinted one into the other—the fair and the ugly, all, all gone, and I am alone.

I am not thirty, yet my hair is white and it is time I was gone.

And to hear death knock at my door this very night would be ecstasy.

[THE END.]

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